

The Beat Within

Volume 9.33

A Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside



We are pleased to bring you our 33rd issue of the year, despite two key players taking the week off from their duties, and deservedly so. Despite the BS rhetoric that came out of the Republican Convention last week. Despite us being on the eve of a crucial Presidential election. Despite the war on terrorism, and the war in Iraq. Despite 9/11 staggering the USA and the world three years ago. Despite the Giants being in the heat of the pennant race against our nemesis, the LA Dodgers. And on the home front, despite funding drying up. Despite the backlog of requests to be a part of this special publication, from those who write heartfelt poems and short stories, the "how to" and "inspirational" pieces, to those who write the disturbingly painful autobiographies and touching letters sitting on this editor's desk, which we attempt to address each day. Despite all of these things, we plow ahead. The Beat machine stops for no one; we gallantly move forward each day, each week, doing what we have done best since our inception in 1996, and that is touch lives, conduct writing workshops and produce this magnificent publication for all to read each week, each day. Welcome once again to the thirty-third issue of *The Beat Within*.

We can't stress this enough, but make this the issue you give away (after reading) to an acquaintance/friend who has never seen this paper before. Turn them on to the important messages that grace these pages from front to back. Then encourage them to do the same. Let's get *The Beat* into as many new hands as possible by sending the same message — pass the paper around! We know many of you have been doing this for years in the institutions you sit in today. We thank you and we encourage you to continue this kindness.

In this fabulous issue, not only are you getting the raw writings of the talented pool of contributors who write in our weekly workshops, but when you get to the back pages of *The Beat Without* (BWO), the whole section features the usual BWO knockout pieces, and, every single entry from "The Tenth Editor's Note Writing Contest," meaning we editors are going to pick our favorite pieces a lot sooner. By featuring all of the submissions, starting on page 45, in this scorching issue of a read, all of us will be able to grasp every single contest contribution, so when the winners are announced, you readers can truly decide if we Beat editors made the right choices. The goal here is to rerun the pieces of the top four writers in a couple of weeks and get the prize money out to the top choices sooner rather than way later. So look for issue 9.35 with the announcement of our four contest winners.

So given that this contest is now over, let's announce *The Beat's* 11th Editor's Note Writing Contest question! Well, after some discussion with colleagues, we debated over topics ranging from the simple but profound question, "Why Do You Write?" to a question about "That Special Song in Your Life."

Instead, we decided to use a topic that was asked in our workshops a few weeks ago. The question we propose to you contest writers is: "The Camera's Your Destiny — The final words from the judge before you were, to your surprise, temporarily released back into the community for six hours were: 'If you truly cherish your freedom, and you want another opportunity to have your freedom back, take this video camera and show me through the camera's eye what freedom means to you. And if I like what I see, when you come back to my court room tomorrow, I'll grant you your freedom with other conditions pertaining to your case.'"

No joke, you have six hours to show the court what freedom means to you, so what will you film, who will you film? How will you attack such a priceless task? No matter if you are already going or are already in placement, CYA, or the pen'. No matter if you are fighting a murder case, a gang-related case, a dope case, or another probation/parole violation, you all have this chance to win your freedom back through the power of the camera.

So in your words, describe what you would show the judge in your video footage that would determine

whether you got your freedom or further incarceration. And tell us how you think the judge would respond to your footage. Good luck."

All contest entries must be in by December 1, 2004. We will run every entry that crosses our desk in *The Beat*. After running all of the submissions, we editors will vote on our favorite pieces. The top four pieces will be selected and reprinted in a future *Beat Without*. The top vote getter will receive a \$100 money order. Second top piece will receive a \$50 money order and third and fourth places will both receive \$25 money orders. Good luck writers. Make sure you have film in the camera!

Before we announce this week's POW (Piece of the Week) recipients, let's fill you in on what topics were addressed prior to the writing produced in our workshops. The first topic, and most popular in the workshops, was: "It All Started When — Slanging, pimping, prostituting to gangbanging, jacking cars, robbing people, breaking into houses and more — all aspects of the game. Which game are you playing or have you played? What made you step into this kind of game? Do you remember when you first got into the game? What was going on in your life that made you turn to this dangerous game?"

What did it feel like to catch your first trick or sell your first sack or bundle? What did it feel like to get jumped in a gang or get money from a girl who was selling her body for you?

As children, we're almost sure that your dream job wasn't anything that involved these illegal activities, so tell us, what game are you playing and how'd you get started?"

Our second topic of discussion was, "When your God looks down on you what does He or She see?"

Lastly, "What's the real problem?"

All three of these topics worked well and truly inspired and created a great tone in the workshops.

Now that you know about the topics, let's praise these outstanding writers who wrote on a Beat topic, or on a topic of their own choice. These POW winners truly moved us to nominate them as issue thirty-three's POW recipients. Props to the 150 Crew's Culero for his touching piece "Meeting My Real Father." To 150's Young Mighty for his on topic piece "In The Game/Out The Game." Also from 150, Cory, for his great commentary, "The Main Problem Is Violence." To one of our favorite 150 people, Abbas, for his on-topic piece, "The Game I Used To Play." Last but not least, to 150's Bank Boy for stepping up huge with "It Started As A Young Teen." Again, we thank these young gentlemen for taking their writing so seriously. Congratulations for being our POW recipients!

In closing this editorial note, let's take a moment to pay tribute to the lives that were lost on September 11, 2001, a day that we'll never forget in our lifetimes. It seems like yesterday when we received word of the Twin Towers in New York City being hit by hijacked commercial planes filled with innocent people. It seems like yesterday when we were watching the footage of innocent people scrambling in the streets of NYC to escape the debris from the crumbling buildings. It seems like yesterday when we were endlessly reading and hearing stories of brave heroes, from police officers, security guards, and firemen, to everyday men and women, who played vital roles in saving their neighbors' lives in NYC. It seems like yesterday that our own city was in mourning, where downtown San Francisco was a ghost town and not a plane was in the sky. It seems like yesterday when, despite the magnitude of the tragedy, we, as a nation and a world, all got along a lot better with our neighbors, who on any other day would have been total strangers.

This issue goes out to all of us who are determined to make this world we live in a better place, be it in a correctional institution, or in our own communities in the free world. We all have to do our part in spreading the love and kindness. Peace to you and may we all help bring peace to the world.

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

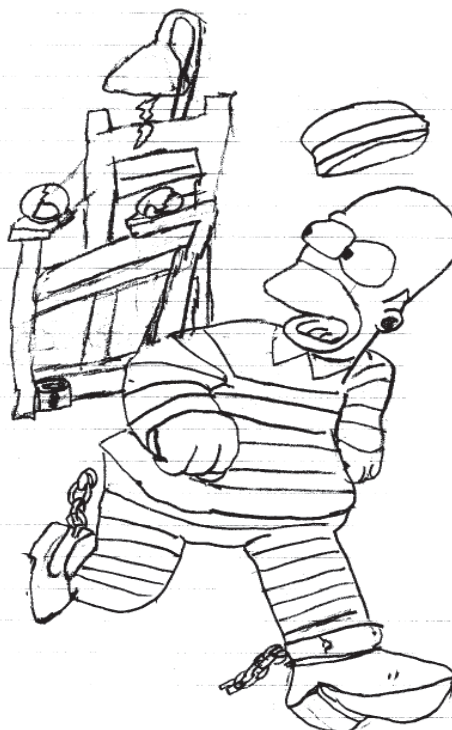
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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden Truth in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at

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Meeting My Real Father

Man, what's cracking with y'all? This that homeboy, Culero. Man, homie finally made it up at Camp. But, ay, man, what is the real problem with me? Well, check it out.

It all started when I was a youngsta. The things that hurt me when I was at that age, was me an' my brothers growing up with different fathers — not knowing who was my real father.

But when I was about nine or ten, my mom decided to call my father when I was living in Palm Springs, California. Then my mom passed me the phone an' told me to say things bad to my dad!

Of course, I didn't know him still. That's why I was saying those things to him, I didn't know him. But I dunno if it hurt him, but I know it hurt me a lot, when I think about it, but later on in life.

While I was gettin' older, we moved out of Palm Springs. Then we were living somewhere, I forgot where (bad memories). My mom came out of nowhere an' said that we were going to go see my dad — the we was like WTF ... umm, okay.

Then we got his address; then we found his house. So my brothers walk in front of me; then they knock on the door. Then my dad's girlfriend opened the door an' let us in. We sat on the couch. Then my dad walked into the room.

We started to talk, an' the last thing I remember — I started to cry. 'Cause I'd seen some pictures of my brothers, an' that told me that even though we wasn't together, he still had us mentally. When my mom took us away from him, she didn't take his love from his kids.

So that was the real problem, with me growing up without a father. But, ay, I'm fit to bounce now. So holla atchu later on!

-Culero, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That's quite a story, illustrated with two intensely memorable moments of contact with your absent father. And that part where you start to cry when you realize that you and your brothers had always been loved by your dad without even knowing it! So, being separated from your dad again, but knowing you were loved, did that make a difference in how you lived your life? If not, why not? Are you ready to make changes so you have a better chance to share, care, and be there for your future children?

I done lost patnas and family to the game. And before they died, some of them told me, "This game ain't the same." If you know the game, you know what I'm talkin' 'bout.

even though we wasn't together, he still had us mentally. When my mom took us away from him, she didn't take his love from his kids.

In the Game / Out the Game

It all started when I started paying attention to the OG's. I used to watch the OG's sell hella coke on the block, but back then I did not pay attention to them that much.

But all the violence, that's what I liked to see. Knocks getting KO'd, ninjas gettin' shot; and watchin' the OG's bounce on 5-0. I thought I would never be in the game. That all changed when I turned thirteen.

I thought I knew the game enough, so me and some of the ninjas from the block, start' doing our thang. At first we said we was in it to get a couple of fits. Then we saw that the money was coming so fast — so we started stackin'.

In junior high, we was flippin' lil' buckets — all of the females on us! Before we knew it, we was coppin' zip after zip. Why stop when the money keep' comin'?

When I turned sixteen, I started really gettin' down, bussin' 'at thang and holdin' it down — took over the block! And me and the squad was out there eatin', stuntin', livin' good!

Then 5-0 start' doin' homework, watchin' ninjas. That's how I got caught. They hit the block, six "taz" cars deep. I just came from bagging my bundle up. I had two zips on me, ain't nowhere to go! They won this time, but I still don't show 5-0 no love.

Now I'm sittin' in here waitin' to go to Camp. When I get out I'm gon' try to stay off the block. I caught too many cases chillin' wit' the game. You can't be in the game forever, if you' smart.

You probably think you' slick, 'cause you ain't got caught yet. But somewhere down the road, you gon' slip up an' get T-rolled. I ain't gon' jinx you — but that's what I know. 'Cause I said the same thing and now I'm here sittin'.

Some people say when you in the game, you in it for life. If you in it fo' life, do ya thang, boy. Me, I'm through. I gotta go legit, or find a new hustle, 'cause standin' on the co'na got me sittin' on something cool.

But at the same time, I'm in here doin' somethin' cool. Don't think I'm goin' soft though. I'm gettin' out the game, but don't get it twisted — 'cause I still buss that thang.

The game ain't gon be there forever, so do whatchu can and get out. And don't try to do too much, 'cause a hater will take you out! I done lost patnas and family to the game. And before they died, some of them told me, "This game ain't the same."

If you know the game, you know what I'm talkin' 'bout. And you ain't soft 'cause you tryin'a get out! So don't let a ninja tell you that! 'Cause I'm a gangsta and I ain't never goin' out. (RIP Mat, Ant, Big Dog, Ju-Ju, Elmo, Young Raym, J-J — see y'all when I get there!)

-Young Mighty, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You are talking raw and straight, even passing on wisdom from the grave. You know we don't like guns, period; but the players in the game do need to hear what a sav' has to say when he gets serious about the way it really goes — even if they don't want to know ... "somewhere down the road, you gon' slip up an' get T-rolled." You're one of few with the mental muscle to publicly admit: "I gotta go legit or find a new hustle...." And we appreciate your generosity of spirit, to put it down on the page for the next man to hear it; 'cause who got in the game just to feel pain? You say you'll always bang, but you won't have to bang in the pen' unless you choose to go back to that scandalous game again. Props on your vision and your decision! Why choose prison or death while you still have heart — and breath!

The Main Problem Is Violence

The main problem in the Bay Area is violence! We are running around these streets popping pills, popping guns with no remorse. The number of incarcerated youths is rising all of the time. It's ridiculous!

Also many people are not interested in getting their education, which is the most important tool in the real world. We have a lack of role models and the leadership that is essential for success. I feel that the system is a problem in itself. The political views adopted by legislators, senators, and our new governor, are killing off communities.

But getting back to the problem of violence, it doesn't make sense for us to be killing off each other for motives that are not worth the consequences.

Music videos play a big role in creating problems in our communities, because they mostly glorify negativity. Young kids watch these so-called rappers "do their thing" — but most of the time, they are putting out a front to make money and make a name, claiming gangster fame.

With all the problems we have today, I pray to God for Him to guide me and help me no longer listen to these gimmicks — because they, too, are a problem.

-Cory, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Fill your mind with words of negativity, and if you already possess a proclivity toward violence and hate — it for sure won't help you change your fate. For it confirms your every act of greed and rage; it glorifies behavior that puts you in a cage. As for the failure of the system to perceive that poverty plus ignorance give rise to criminality, it's on us to raise consciousness in and beyond our communities. Great piece.

God has bigger and better things for me and you.

The Game I Used To Play

The game I used to play, was a very dangerous game. I didn't care about my life. I would do things that jeopardized my freedom, my life and my soul, as well as the trust people had in me.

Peer pressure had a part in my getting involved in this game. I remember when I first started. I was in the middle of the ninth grade and started drifting from my real friends and getting involved with weed.

I was tired of living by the strict rules of my house. So when I smoked, it made me feel those problems didn't exist. But now that I've matured, I see that when I smoked I was running away from my problems instead of facing them like a real man.

When I started selling weed, it felt powerful to have people come up to me and spend their money on my drugs. Then my addiction to weed got even worse, and I started stealing. From there, I went to robbery to support my habit. That was the game I used to play, until I got incarcerated.

Now that my mind is free, I see life totally differently. I have had the opportunity to change, and I'm jumping at the chance.

-Abbas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have more than merely matured, you've allowed your experience to bring you wisdom beyond your years. However it is you resolve your relation to the strict rules of your family's household, you will no longer run from reality — for you've learned that it creates another reality soon enough, adding new and deeper problems to the ones you already had. There will always be problems in life, but if you're willing to face them and put work in, there will also be solutions; time will tell. Problems and solutions are part of the rhythm of living well.

It Started As a Young Teen

When I was fourteen years old, I started to hang with some real bad people.

We was in a group of ten, and we all was smoking, drinking — so we all went for a walk. We seen somebody. So two of us went and rob' that person. I broke his neck. My so-call' friend get the money.

I don't know if this is a game. Okay, some people think it's a game, 'cause people gang bang, so sometime' they do what they are told is best for the group. But I don't bang.

I would never ask no girl to sell her body for me, 'cause — one, I'm not a pimp; two, I don't want to be a pimp; three, I don't want my sister to sell her body to nobody 'cause if she do, I will look for her pimp and show him how I feel about him.

I wish I never did what I did, 'cause the place I'm in right now is hell to me! I want to start a new life, 'cause this ain't me. I need to get out and help my family, because they need me the most — and I need them.

I can't remember the first time I got in the game, 'cause I never did get in a game before, but I don't want my kids to do what me and their mom did when we was young.

-Bank Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When this piece was read out loud and someone laughed at the words, "I broke his neck," — it reflected everything pernicious and dangerous and scary, in that street group mentality! A laugh, a bold suggestion, a rash act on the part of your partner whom you watch as he's watching you; and soon you two (or more) do together what neither would do alone (before). That's why recovering from that life style (death style) requires you to be willing and able to stand alone and think on your own. Thank you for your serious piece, you are indeed recovering from 'hood disease.

I wish I never did what I did, 'cause the place I'm in right now is hell to me! I want to start a new life

When I Lost My Grandmother

It all started when I lost my grandmother. At that point, I started drinking and smoking bomb. See, after my grandma passed away, my grandfather couldn't take it and tried to hang himself.

So I moved to my auntie's house in Stockton. At first it was all Jesus. My auntie felt bad for me, so whenever I asked for money, she'd provide. Eventually that got old, and she realized I was just spending the money on drugs.

So I had to find other ways to support my habit. So my cousin and I started stealing out of cars, houses and stores; then moved on to robbing people with my step-uncle's gun. But one day my uncle caught me sneaking his gun and kicked me out!

I had to move back to my mom's in Hayward. Since my mom was involved in a gang and used, the courts took me from her when she got arrested.

I moved in with my other grandparents, whose house was in Newark. I kept stealing stuff out of cars and eventually got caught three different times, taking a plea bargain each time. I kicked it with all gangstas because they showed me love — they even tried to make sure I stayed out of trouble; well, the OG's anyway.

From there, things escalated, and I am currently in a maximum security unit in Alameda County Juvenile Hall. I've finally learned that my grandma went, because it was her time — and that she would be very upset to see me like this!

I also now realize that living this way has gotten me nowhere. It's time for a change within myself. I only wish I knew then, what I know now. This is dedicated to all my Bay players, stay up y'all.

-Smiley, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There's no way you could have known then what you know now. But what you know now will prove to be good or bad, depending on what you do with that knowledge. 'Cause if you go back to doing what you've been doing, it doesn't mean a thing; or, at best, it waits in your mind for you to arrest yourself and put yourself back in line. Or, if you change, start doing right and living sane, you now know where not to go and what not to do — and your experience plus example is there to help the next hurt and confused young foo' who runs into you. Your grandma's spirit is watching, so do ya do! Get correct with it, too!

Why do I try to impress others with a front? I find myself trying to fit in, trying to impress my friends and also the little family that I have.

Jeopardized Life and Freedom

My first hustle was selling D, dope. I started because I wanted money. I wanted what everyone else had. I was fourteen, living in West Oakland. I wanted nice cars, shoes, and money in my pocket.

I got all that, too, I was satisfied. Yet I wasn't satisfied. So I needed quicker money. So I started robbing people outside my neighborhood. The first time I robbed someone, I was fourteen. It was a Chinaman. I got what I wanted, but I had to hurt him — and that never bothered me either.

I've done so many robberies, I lost count. I'm seventeen years old now, and the reason I keep robbing, is 'cause I want that money. For the last three years, I've jeopardized my freedom and life for money — and it hasn't been worth it!

Today, I sit here for a serious crime; I don't know when I'm getting out — all due to wanting quick money! I don't recommend this life style to anyone. It brings a lot of pain. That's real.

-E, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It does seem like a dirty trick that a fourteen year old can go out and make money so easy and quick, that it's only a matter time before he's totally addicted to crime. And like all addicts, as his habit gets older, his actions get bolder and colder, till he's lost all control over his mind — he'll even brag he's the sick wit' it kind! But it's a time bomb waiting to explode, and the pain that follows is worse than anything he's known. Thanks for keeping it real — a Beat hero, ya feel! Stay strong.

Who Am I?

Who are you in this world? Who are you to yourself? The way you are, who the hell are you? Not yourself! You don't act like you! Why are you trying to be someone else? Do you know you can't ever, ever be anyone else? You're choosing to live in the dark will get you killed or locked up!

Man, who am I? The true person inside! Why do I try to impress others with a front? I find myself trying to fit in, trying to impress my friends and also the little family that I have. But life is precious, and now that I am locked up, I understand that what I have been doing is wrong.

But what do you consider wrong? Living without: Most people (teens) that are without parent figures tend to look to the streets for family. The people we call our "homegirls, homeboys, patnas and friends" — sometimes lead us in the wrong direction. And the only reason we follow, is because we want to feel accepted.

So, say you are used to running with your "click" and you never get caught doing wrong. But one day, you are without your "click" and find yourself tempted to do what you would do with your friends. "Where are they now?" You think they are not there. They are nowhere to be found when you feel you need them the most. So you call them — no answer.

So now you say, "F— it!" And you go out by yourself. You've never done this by yourself. Stop! Think! If you find yourself being scared to do wrong on your own, then you don't need to be getting into any trouble!

You then find yourself asking yourself, "What am I doing? Why am I doing this?" You are now worried about your well-being. Be cool.

I will get at you next week.

-Vincent, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Everyone is always talking about "family values", but when your family is your homeboys and homegirls on the street — you carry those values inside you, too. Now you may say that they lead you astray, but they may also be saying the same thing about you. You've internalized the group's values. Now, when you're alone and going out on your own, you're getting all kinds of warning signs that the group presence helps you down out when you're all there together. But guess we'll have to wait till next week to see what happens next, eh?

It All Started When....

It all started when I was little and my big brothers and cousins had me doing hella bad things like going into Toys 'R' Us and taking the bikes out of the back door. And if I didn't, they'd hit me in the chest, and if I cried, they would hit me again and again until I started taking every punch they gave me and started fighting them back.

My family had me doing a lot of bad things that I didn't always like doing, like robbing people, breaking into people's cars and fighting, but not anymore.

As soon as I get out of jail, I am going to job corps so they can help me get a job in Culinary Arts, and I really think that's going to help me turn my life around.

Every night I've been praying and hoping that God would help me turn my life around because I don't like for the simple fact that when some people see me, they get scared and tell their kids to go in the house until I leave. I don't like it for the simple fact that I take my mom through stress when I go to jail, so I started praying that everything gets better, and so far, it has, because I did change some of my ways.

What made me want to be a chef is when I was little, I always used to stand in the kitchen and watch my mom and dad cook, and it always looked fun to me. So one day my parents left, and my sister was hungry, so I made her something to eat. I did not think she was going to like it, but she came to me and said that "it was good, could she have some more?" I was five years old, so it kinda became a habit.

-Donzel, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Not anymore! Good for you. You are a smart guy - It's so nice to read a story like yours. It takes a strong person to overcome a family that encourages negative behavior. You can do it! Keep us up to date, with your Job Corps program. We look forward to eating some of your special dishes too.

From The Castle The White Flag Is Showin'

The criminal life is not for me. This lifestyle is getting real old, like bread leaving it out too long then it starts to mold. I'm so sick of going back and forth between juvenile hall and other programs.

I'm getting older and shhh will get worse if I don't stop and turn my life around. I'm tired of looking over my shoulder for rollers, while I got bundles in my mouth. I'm tired of taking that route. This is my last stop in this shhh hole, I got things to do in my life, plans to carry out.

I'm 'bout to go finish high school, get a diploma, and go to college. My life is in motion since I have this new plan, which means just now after seventeen years, my life is starting.

-Branko B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: To keep it real, we feel like you've just taken the white flag down and aren't showing it anymore. You aren't giving up; you're just starting like you said. What college do you plan on going to? What would you like to study? Maybe we're jumping the gun, but we're just excited to hear somebody with the desire to pursue higher education. Keep up with the good thoughts and they will happen. Until you write again...

**I'm 'bout to
go finish high
school, get a
diploma, and go
to college.**

Cause And Effect

The law of cause and effect is always at work in our lives. When we cause suffering for others, our lives become corrupt and restricted, causing us to suffer and commit more wrongdoing. On the other hand, when we bring joy and happiness to others or prevent suffering and confusion, our lives will improve and expand, causing us to experience joy and happiness and, in turn, prompting us to do more good.

Every action is a seed planted in the law of life. That seed can either be positive or negative depending on your action. The law of cause and effect is real. It's like the law of gravity; you can't see it but it's real and it exists. If you want positive outcomes in life you have to work for others' happiness and prevent suffering.

Everybody, at one point in their lives, is going to get it one day. You can either get it now or later. Hopefully it won't be when you're in prison doing some time. Hopefully you will get it before it's too late. Think ahead and realize the consequences for your actions.

I don't believe in hell. There is hell on earth and there is heaven on earth; you can either be in heaven or hell depending on your actions and causes. Start doing the right things before it's too late.

-Jue B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: As we've come to expect from you, this is a very good piece. You have grown more and more mature through your writings. What will it take for you to embark on actions that lead towards the positive? Now that you've recognized the reality of cause and effect, how will you seek causes that lead to better effects? How will you bring joy and happiness, as well as relieve the suffering and confusion, to those around you? We hope that you will keep it up and share you knowledge amongst your peers.

"Free Style"

Yo', on the real you j-cats is wastin' my time
Writin' rhymes that sound more like you droppin' a dime
I guarantee you when everybody read my lines
They'll fast forward past your verse and go straight to mine
What they mean by The Beat Within
Is the beat within your chest beatin'
That you know my raps heat seepin'

I'm a hustla I like presidents better off dead
I'm making money rappin' while I got ya' pops bobbin' his head
Catch yo' breath 'cause all of a sudden asthmatic
My flows hit you wit' a low blow to let you have it
I'm the best rapper in The Beat Within so call it quits
I'm a steak while you j-cats is kibbles and bits

-M. Burna B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: That freestyle was alright, but we don't know if we could give you 'the best rapper' title. For while others are writing about experiences they've been through that are hard to talk about, you're just trying to make lyrical rivals. Sure, we like your style, but it's getting old like clowns that cry along with clowns that smile. So put your ego to the side for a while, go that extra mile, and write a piece about what you're going through just so we could have it on file.

Prototype Two

Prototype one was their best success
 'til prototype two was put to the test
 Not really a test, more an experiment
 PT's data wasn't clear, I wasn't all coherent
 They needed a controlled environment, named it a "project"
 manipulated aquariums like insect to dissect
 New chemical variables made it a whole new ballgame
 it made prototype two much easier to tame
 Self-hatred and violence, building the mind's construction
 with the new technology it was a weapon of mass destruction
 And to make this weapon time was strategically invested
 to make millions of dollars every time they arrest it
 Modern day slavery — readers can you see it?
 Can you feel this creature's pain? Will you help to free it?
 Do you empathize when it feels helpless against genocide?
 So then you understand when it thinks of suicide
 For the readers who see PT's cultural disintegration
 then why can't you see PT's our generation?

-Deep Speech B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The reality is that the projects have become experiments that, for the most part, have badly failed. Time was strategically invested, experts and architects and policymakers engineering what we can only hope they meant to have the best possible outcome, but which have too often become overrun by the negative. What can you do to create a new prototype, one that isn't an experiment but is rather based on your experiences, and that will lead to freedom instead of slavery? How can people help free your, and the other trapped creatures', pain? How can you free yourselves?

POW — They're Dead

Well I think the problem is nowadays people in Oakland or anywhere else just don't give a shhh. It's just the simple fact that ninjas got family to look after, people to take care of, and when it comes to the fact where killing is involved, they just say, "If it's my time to go then I'm going to go."

But once they get shot a few times and they live, then they wonder, "should I stop or should I not?" If they don't have anything to live for they going to say, "screw it. If I die — I die." And before you know it — POW they're dead.

-Demetrius, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What you wrote here is a big part of the problem today. It is the attitude and mentality of not caring about life. If we all cared a little more, then life could be a little easier on everyone, but the reality of it is if this attitude and mentality carries on — it will carry many more to an early grave. Will you help to stop fueling the fire? If so, how?

**Life is
 not easy.
 Banging
 doesn't
 make it
 easier**

it. I got put up on game, got put down on the 'hood after putting in work. I wanted to start getting money.

Now I am fourteen and caught a case but I don't want to incriminate myself. I got out in a group home as a three hundred kid from 2001 to 2002. I was bouncing around the bay in different homes and such, still banging, catching little assault cases. At the end of 2002, my grandma got me out of the three hundred system.

So I am back in San Jose and four months out, I catch a weapon case. I failed EMP, group homes, then I went camp in 2003 and ran four months later. Two months on the run and I almost catch a dope case but tossed my stuff in some bushes.

I went to a group home and got tormented. Now I am in the Hall and hoping that I go back to the group home. Life is not easy. Banging doesn't make it easier but it does feel good to know that you do your part to maintain organization in the 'hood cause when nothing is left — the 'hood and pride of what you are will still be there.

-Luni, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This piece is hella sad and you almost drew tears from our eyes. In a way, you already know that your life hasn't gotten better through gang banging, but you also feel good about the things you accomplish. But can you be proud of something else? Can you make your future better than your past? We know you had it rough in the beginning, but it doesn't have to end that way. PS, here's something to think about — granny. She ain't gonna be there forever so maybe you can make her happy while she's still alive. We know you don't want to hear that but it's reality.

For The Thrill

What brought me to the Halls was GTA (Grand Theft Auto). I have already been charged with two cases of the same old shhh. The first time I was let off easy had to stay in a cell for a couple of hours then let out on probation. I had a chance to do right while I was out on probation but my dumb ass had to go and mess up again for the second time.

The first time I got caught up, I said that I wouldn't do that same shhh again. Next thing you know a couple of months later I was serving time in the Hall. I guess when you really learn that you mess up is when you're in the Hall locked up for most of the day.

The first time you get away with a crime and get some money out of it, it makes you just want to keep on doing it. You are going to get away a lot of times before you get caught up. To me that shhh ain't worth it and I'm working on trying to change my lifestyle around as much as I can. I just didn't listen to the people who told me the real.

All I can say is that we all make mistakes and hopefully, learn from those mistakes, 'cause I sure did.

-Victor, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Nice writing. It sounds like you have truly learned your lesson this time. But now you must have a plan. You've stated the things that you will no longer do, but what will you do instead? What in the world can you do "for the thrill" that won't get you locked up? Hey, here's a suggestion — there's a video game called "GTA" and it's almost like real life. Just don't let it get to your head. Good luck with gaining and maintaining your freedom.

**Self-hatred and violence, building the
 mind's construction
 with the new technology it was a
 weapon of mass destruction**

When I Was Born

What's up folks it's Luni and it all started when I was born. Moms and Pops were selling dope. Pops went to the pen. I went to grandma's house in San Jose and grew up and started to kicking it with the homies. Then I started noticing things happening around me and some I liked, like how all the homies getting money.

By the time I was about eight, I had knew about gangbang. I was young but at this age I started living

You Don't Know My Struggle (Part 2)

Plans to make a profit off of quote in quote
 "Good deeds," and stupid me goes along 'cause I'm tired
 I read to sleep
 Tired of chips and tired of being cold
 Sex becomes an every night thing
 Just to be warm, fed, and taken care of
 Soon it gets old and I'm alone again
 Walking, praying, and hoping to see shooting stars
 So maybe a wish will come true
 But there's not many stars flying across the sky everyday
 Crying because I don't know what to do
 Turn myself in or just have faith
 Too stubborn to say I was wrong
 So I keep going alone
 Cold, hungry, dirty, but what some call free
 Feeling so dirty I don't want to go to church
 Scared they will smell
 I'm unclean inside and out
 Wishing I would have noticed my wrongs
 Ten years ago
 When my family washed their hands of me
 Listening to people
 Talking about being in the game to win it
 Then thinking about how I'm forced
 in the game just to survive
 To live from day to day
 Losing weight and praying that today I'd just drop dead
 But my legs keep moving and my hearts still pumping
 Soon
 I've done this routine time after time
 I'm on my deathbed
 Five weeks pregnant and the only choice is
 To give and go to jail
 Or die without fulfilling my purpose
 Two and a half months away from eighteen
 This has been part of my struggle I faced with God
 I am now three and a half months pregnant
 Healthy
 And two and a half weeks to my eighteenth birthday
 Thank you Lord
 Once again.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Imay, once again you have powerfully illustrated your struggles for us. We feel that you've come to a place in your life that you are going to have to step up and make the necessary changes in your life. You are about to be eighteen and a mommy. Your decisions from now on won't only affect you, but your baby as well. Over the past few months we have heard about your struggles, your plans for the future. Now it's time to be the strong woman that you want to be. Only you have control over your past - How do you choose to remember it? It can either take you down or empower you. Which do you choose?

**The man I was talking
 to was hella cool and
 fine so when he asked
 me if I wanted to go
 home with him
 I said "yeah".**

Wishing I would have noticed my wrongs Ten years ago When my family washed their hands of me

That Basketball Game

It all started when I went to a basketball game with my little sister.

When we were on our way back, we walked by this one female's house around the corner from mine and all of my potnas was over there hollerin' at us to come over.

She wanted to go home and I had to stay with her 'cause my mom was hella pissed at me since I had barely come home after being gone for a month, so I could only leave if I stayed with her. So we kept walkin'. When she seen her man at our neighbor's house, we stopped by there. He was chillin with his brother and cousins and they asked us to go around the corner to that female's house we barely walked by with them.

My sister went home, and I went with them. When we got there, there was this fool I didn't recognize up in there and he was hella fine. I was just chillin or whatever and I was standing up, talking or whatever.

I will never forget the first words he said to me. He asked me if my feet was nailed to the floor and I told him they wasn't and went and sat next to him. We started talking and shhh and he wasn't like nobody I ever met before. Plus he was black, and I never messed with no black dude before since it's all white where I'm from.

Then my potnas just walked out the door and left. I couldn't believe they left me. I couldn't go home 'cause my mom wouldn't let me in. The man I was talking to was hella cool and fine so when he asked me if I wanted to go home with him I said "yeah".

In the cab, on the way to his house, he told me he was pimpin'. That night we got some drink and he had some weed and he laced me on the game. All that night and the following day him and me and one of his females was with me and I hit the track that next night. And I liked gettin that money! But the police arrested me right before dawn.

But it's all good, 'cause I just got taken to my mom. But I went back, and that's how it all started for me.

-Jessica, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wow! Jessica - What did this guy say that convinced you that this was a good idea? Do you regret that day? Why did you go back? This is a powerful story, but we want to know more. How is it, that, this kind of guy can convince girls that this is a good lifestyle? How do you feel about this guy today? What would you tell a girl that you see in the same position that you've been in? Do you have any advice? - What kind of advice do you have for yourself? Where do you see your life going? - Are you headed in a direction that you are proud of - or that you see a future? In your next piece give us more answers - we want to know more about you - How do you think about these experiences?

Los Juegos Que He Jugado

Los juegos que yo he jugado son vender drogas y usar drogas. Yo vendo drogas porque es facil hacer feria de esta manera y porque no me gusta trabajar. También en varias ocasiones robado ranflas, y quizás alguien de tu familia ha sido victima. Yo fumo mota, crystal, y tomo tragos de amargo liquor para el dolor. Chale, yo no sé si las personas que hacen lo que yo hago me comprederan.

From The Beat: Si te entendemos que has estado poniendo tu vida en riesgo por culpa de la droga y que también te has estado guiando en el camino de la destrucción con tus amigos. Queremos que sepas que no está bien lo que estas haciendo porque lo único que haces es hacer corto tu vida y estas contribuyendo con el desmadre que pasa en la vida.

The Games I've Played

The games that I have played are selling drugs and using drugs. I sell drugs because it's easy to make money this way, and also because I don't like to work. Also, on various occasions, I've stolen cars.

Maybe one of your family members fell victim to me. I smoke weed, crystal, and I take shots of hard liquor for my pain. Damn, I don't know if people that do what I do will understand me.

-Anonymous B4, SF/YGC

Confused

I'm so confused

So lost in this world

All I know is that I love my family

Some friends and God

I know that I hurt, I miss, I love

I feel sadness, loneliness, and on some occasions, joy

I know that I want to be free

And be the way our Lord wants me to be

I know that I care so much about people

And I know that other than these things

I'm deeply confused

-Sad Eyes, Marin

From The Beat: It's ok to be confused Sad Eyes. Sometimes it seems like the whole world is confused. You have a good heart, and you try to be good. What do you think the Lord wants for you? Do you ever ask Him in your prayers? Does God ever answer you? If so, what does He say? If you don't like the answer, can you choose your future? Or do you always like God's answers?

**Seeing my
brothers selling
dope and having a
lot of money and
females — I wanted
to be like them**

Crystal Meth and Me

The first time I tried crystal meth, it was a great experience. I was only thirteen years old. I liked it a lot. I liked the way it made me feel. I'm sixteen and a half now.

I did crystal meth for a full year until I was fourteen. And I got really sick off of it. I had to get on medication for the rest of my life. So, then I quit for two years. But then I did it again, like five or six times.

Then I quit for good, because it put me in a mental hospital — and then to juvenile hall.

-Baby Doll Krystle, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You tell it all in a handful of sentences. Great writing about a serious subject. We hope the readers that need to feel you on this, do. Meanwhile, take good care of you!

**it (crystal meth)
put me in a
mental hospital
— and then to
juvenile hall.**

I Need Money

My game is the hustling part, because I need money, that's the most important thing in the world. When I started, was when I needed something to eat and some clothes and to help my little brother and my dad, also, my little sisters.

The first thing that I started was robbing people and stealing from people. No money was coming in, so I started to sell dope and different kinds of drugs. When I started selling dope, it felt good, because the money was coming fast and I had money.

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a doctor, but when I grew up, it was something different. Seeing my brothers selling dope and having a lot of money and females — I wanted to be like them. But I did not know how to start, so I asked and they told me how. Listen to this: "The more money, the harder the hustle." Peace.

-Drake, Marin

From The Beat: You're not grown — you're still growing, so your story doesn't have to end with hustling. What else are you good at, that's legal, that you could do to earn the money you need? Can you use any of your hustling skills in legal work? Do you intend to hustle indefinitely? What do you think will be your future, if you keep on in the hustling game? Do you ever still want to be a doctor? What was there about being a doctor that used to appeal to you? Could you go back to school, to college and med school? Why or why not?

I Think

I think that I started to do all the bad things that I'm doing right now, because the way I grew up, and watching the older homies do the things they used to do, and I wanted to be just like them and do the things they do, like smoking weed, drinking, gang banging and robbery.

I used to see all the older homies do all these things and I wanted to do the things they did, but now I regret everything I did that I learned from them, because it just made me end up in this hella awful place. And now that I know that my girl is gonna have my baby, it stresses me out even more, because I'm not doing anything to help her out, and that makes me feel hella bad, and now that I know that I'm a have a baby, I'm gonna stop all this bullshhhh I'm doin'.

-Alex, Marin

From The Beat: You know you can give all the nonsense up. It sounds like you've already tried what the older homies were doing, and now you're ready to give it up and be a good father to your baby. Are you ready to help out your baby's mama? How will you help? Get a part-time job and give her diapers, food, clothes money, etc.? Baby sit? What will you teach your baby?

So Many Times

I've been here so many times that they don't want to give me no more chances, and I don't blame them because I have done so bad on the outs that my mom don't even know what to do with me. I regret doing all the stuff I did to come back in here.

I've been here in detention six times already and my judge and PO already want me to go to Adobe Mountain for eight months and then get out on parole for two years. I missed a lot of things on the outs, like hanging out with my friends that turned their backs on me.

I wish I was with my mom right now — I hate going to sleep without knowing where my mom is at. I hate that sometimes I can't sleep.

-Javier, Maricopa Durango, Arizona

From The Beat: Man, this is a sad story. It's sad to hear how many times you've been back to detention, and it's sad that you realize why you're there. It's sad that you don't think you'll get another chance, instead being sent to Adobe, and it's sad that you're missing so much on the outs. It's sad that your friends turned their backs on you, and it's sad that you miss your mom. What is it going to take to make this, the sixth time, your last time locked up? How can you make the changes you need to make so that you do good on the outs?

A Changed Man

I don't really got a game, but I do some crazy stuff like breaking in a gun store and taking all the guns.

When I was little I was always doing some crazy stuff. I burned down people's houses, I blew up stuff and I beat up people. But I didn't expect to get anything out of it, just fun. The things I've done were extremely stupid and immature, but those things hurt other people bad.

Up to this point before I got locked up I became worser and worser, but when I get out I'm gonna be completely different. Those kind of things are not even on my mind anymore. I don't feel right when I think about these things.

I can't believe I'm in this place locked up. I feel extremely miserable. I feel like I don't belong in here because I'm a changed man.

-Jj B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Man, JJ — this is a scary piece. It's scary that you used to burn things and steal guns and hurt people, and it's even scarier that you just did it for fun. Why do you think that hurting people was fun for you? We're also curious how you've become a changed man. What has happened that has made you decide to change? When you get out, how will you keep from being tempted to hurt people again?

Only Myself To Blame

I got started in the game

Can't give a name

Only myself to blame

Started with the grass

Before I was whoopin' ass

Went on to the 'caine

Now I'm just insane

Kept goin' to the E

Got to ask to take a pee

'Cause it's not up to me

Took a shroom

Now alone in my room

Don't want to get into the dealin'

Surely not the stealin'

All I do now is kneel

Only pray

That one day

I'll be okay

-Tm, Marin

From The Beat: What would being okay mean for you? How are you doing in Juvy without having access to drugs? Do you need a drug program? If so, can you ask your counselor or med tech to hook you up with an outpatient program near your home? There's no shame in asking for help when you need it. Good luck!

It Was Just An Accident!

Getting the fame

By playing the game

All of a sudden

It wasn't the same

Tricking to slanging

All you're doing is blaming!

I got a plan

And I hope I can

Make that difference

Taking a ride

Down that lane

Smoking that crys

And Mary Jane

It took that fateful leap

And off the road I went

That's when I knew

That my life was bent

Now I take a different road

Not to see that dreadful memory

It changed my life forever

I'll do my best to not go back to that life ever

-Jenny, Marin

From The Beat: Jenny, you're so bright and imaginative, you should be able to make it any way you want. You've written about the troubles you've already encountered in your young life. We just hope you have the spunk, courage and patience to get yourself into college and get that job you've got lined up. Best of luck always. You deserve it!

**It changed my
life forever**

**I'll do my best to not go
back to that life ever**

When I Was Younger

It all started when I was younger, when I saw my dad get killed, and when he was beating on my mom. I think it had something to do with my attitude.

After I saw my mom getting beat on and my dad get shot, I started to flip out. I started robbin' people and fighting.

-Young Samm B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Man, Samm, sounds like you've been through it at a young age! We're sorry, no one should have to see and be a victim of such violence. Have you found any ways to deal with your anger and pain that doesn't involve hurting others and putting your freedom at risk? Do you have anyone you can talk to? Doesn't writing help? The fact that you understand where your problems began means that you can change your actions, if you want to. We hope you do.

I Was Born...

I was born into this corrupted world
Sucking on my mama's biddies.

I wasn't born into this world with a
Silver spoon so tha good life wouldn't fit me.
So that's why I went to the streets multiplying
Stacks of hundreds and fifties.

I had to pack thumpers 'cause jealous ninjas
Was out to get me.
At a young age I was ready to ride so my big homies
And Bra let me.

Weasel — Amerikas nightmare like Freddy
Got heavy into the game and started to
Slang and bang on the block.
(To be continued...)

-Weasel B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Do you know anybody that didn't grow up with a silver spoon in their mouth but still didn't resort to the streets for recognition? Did you know you were headed in the wrong direction? Did you have that premonition? Why is the man who grew up in a bad neighborhood but stayed in school different? Is it really the fault of your surroundings? Or is it the fault of you and your lack of interest in wanting to listen?

It Starts With

It starts with one fight

One thought, one stab with a knife
One punch, one kick, now it feels right
One lick, one hit, to put you in my game
One body, reload the shotty, the streets know your name
One shot, two shots, three shots, four
Now you got the cops knockin' on your door
One call, one story, the cops on your line
Don't be stupid, can't escape the one time

-Chinatown B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Really good writing. It does start out that small, but we don't believe you can't escape that first time, or, at least, that you can't stop and change direction after the first time. We agree though, "don't be stupid."

When God Looks Down

When God looks down on me, I think He sees a young thug and me doin' bad things, but I know He sees something good in me, but I don't want to see that side of me 'cause I am into this gangbanging.

-J-Stub B2, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Deep piece, J-Stub. What is it about gangbanging that makes it worth doing things you admit even God sees as wrong?

Paranoia

The real problem is that I look at everyone as if they are trying to manipulate me. When I have conversations with people I look for the angle or why we are having the conversation in the first place. So the problem is I really don't feel other people.

If I did not have to talk to anyone I don't think I would talk to anyone. From this people think that I'm better than everyone else. That's what be getting me in so many fights. Being handsome don't help any, that makes things worse. The problem of jealousy makes everything hostile. I don't feel I'm better than anyone, I just do my thing.

-Leek B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: And you should keep doing your thing if your thing is beneficial to you. Have you been manipulated by people a lot? How did you get to the point where you felt like everybody was trying to get over on you? Don't you feel bad when you think someone is trying to manipulate you and you find out they were trying to help you from the beginning? Why or why not?

God Watching Over Me

When God looks down on me, I think He sees a young man who really wants to succeed in life, but is at the crossroad in life. He really wants to do good, but it seems as if bad things always come his way. God has watched a talented young man waste his life and gangbang.

The funny thing is that God sees the good things this young man has done, and the sincerity in this man's heart, the drive He has for succeeding and numerous other things. This is why, in my opinion, God hasn't pushed the stop button on this young man's clock of life.

So when God looks down on me He sees something special. Despite the negative things I've done and I do, I ask for forgiveness and I believe He forgives me, and blesses me because He loves me.

-Afro B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We hope he does see the young man who you describe. Even more, we hope that you continue to build upon the good things — the sincerity, the drive for success — and leave the bad behind. We're not worried about God pushing the stop button, however — we're worried that your gangbanging ways will catch up in the form of a bullet. How are you going to help God extend your life? Do you think of God when you're doing the negative things you do?

How He Sees Me

I think God sees a good person inside of me. I think that He sees a young man with wisdom.

The reason I say that is because I see that inside of me. Even though I do a lot of wrong stuff in my life (robbing, stealing, hustlin', and everything else). I and He know that I am capable of doing a lot better.

He knows I don't belong in this situation right now, but this is his way of pushing me right now. He's giving my life a time-out right now so I can have time to reflect on my life, and on the things that I'm doing wrong. I never think that God hates me 'cause if He did, I would be worse than this, or I might be dead.

-Ellis, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You got a great attitude. The best way to spend your time in the Hall is reflecting on yourself, on your life. What kind of person are you? What do you want to accomplish in life? How do you want to represent yourself? What do you stand for?

Light In Me

Yo yo, here we go again
 this life is going to end
 I am trying twist but I can't get bent
 They trying to send me away,
 but I am not going to let that happen
 This world ain't bright in me
 it ain't enough light in me
 so am going to have to work harder
 because this is not working
 I am tired of seeing my family sitting down
 and durking
 they need to get off they ass and start to working
 I am tired of seeing people lying on me
 and dying on me.
 Yo yo, here we go again
 this life is going to end
 I am trying twist but I can't win
 This world ain't bright in me
 I am trying not to lose
 but it ain't enough light in me
 up inside of me
 These people need more weeding
 and stop the killing
 when I wake up I look up and pray
 and say thank you for letting me see another day
 hoping not somebody to get sprayed or laid
 but until that day I am going to pray
 and ask God for another better day —
 Hoping for another better day.

-Charles B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: There are some slick rhymes up in this piece, Charles, and we like it most when they come with meaning. Why do you say the world isn't bright in you, especially when you come with lines that shine their light through The Beat? How can you help God provide for better days?

The Easy Way Out

People say they have to be in this game to survive, and I ain't gon' lie — at one point, I was saying the same thing. But to me, nobody really has to live that life.

Most ninjas, such as myself at one point — was just ignorant to try life the hard way! But the reality is that making money the legal way is probably not even the hard way; it's basically the easy (and only) way out.

The game is just a trick performed by the system. It's just up to us whether you play or not. And playing that game with the system, most likely you're gonna lose. You're better off playing the other game the system has to offer — and that's getting a job and trying to make it in life.

If you don't, you gon' get caught one day, and find out what you been doin' ain't harder than being behind bars! That's all Beat. One luv.

-Lil' Samoa, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When you finally decide to sit down and write for us — you've really got something to say! This is some straight talk. From your own experience, you offer education here to anyone willing to listen and learn. Life is already giving them the lesson, and you'll helping them figure out the answer.

**The game is just a trick
 performed by the system.**

Recognize The Beat

Even though I'm in here again
 I recognize the positives like The Beat Within
 But this particular piece shouts out to Jason
 Thanks for your wisdom
 You let me know what I'm feeling
 And just to let you know
 I'm always feelin' yo' art
 It seems like every time you draw
 It comes straight from the heart
 Keep up the fight
 'Cause you make me see a new door
 A deeper perspective in life
 And what's worth fighting for
 I don't normally do this so I'm gone bring it to an end
 Just recognizing you and The Beat Within.

-Deep Speech B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're not the only one who feels Jason's wisdom and heart — all of us who are lucky enough to work with him are lucky to know him as well. We'd love to bring Jason into more of our units; as you so eloquently state, he's able to speak from a place of knowledge and experience that has a way of connecting. We hope that you look at Jason as an example. It's not easy coming through this experience and coming out a man, but through the Hall, YA, San Quentin, New Folsom, and the SHU at Pelican Bay, Jason did it. You have the tools to do it as well. Come with your heart, keep fighting your fight and probing for that deeper perspective.

What I Became!

When I became what I became, I was ten years old. I watched my brother get shot in both his kneecaps. I had already been carrying a .38 in my backpack, so I chased him down, shooting at him, and then I became what I am today.

I hate authority. I don't listen to them for any reason unless I have to. I have too much "don't give a damn about nothin'" in my system.

I lost my brother and my father. The most tragic one was my cousin "Man-Man." Then, I really stopped and thought twice about things, but then said, "forget it," and do the same things I've been doing. This is how it started. My life....

-Lil' Jepeabo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Man, Lil' Jepeabo, the loss of loved ones is very painful. How do you feel about it today? Sad? Angry? Helpless? When you think about your father, brother and cousin — what do you remember? Don't think about all the pain of losing them. Remember the happy times, and think about those around you. Who loves you? Who do you give a damn about? Yourself? Think about if something happens to you, who will have to go through the pain of that loss?

No Problem

I've never slanged nothin'.
 I've never pimped no girl.
 I've never prostituted myself.
 I'm not no gang-banger.
 I've never car-jacked.
 I've never robbed anybody!
 I've never broke into any houses.
 The real problem is there is no problem.

-Dark One, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It sounds like the real problem is you are in the Hall, with no problem — Right? We don't have a problem with that. Do you? Nice resume.

It All Started When

I am a victim of the game!
And it's all pain
"But I desire not to walk the same"
I see a lot of my people falling, walking in the same direction
Packing pistols in need of protection
Hell, is what I see in my section
Or at least a reflection?
There's no love or affection
When I started I had a whole lot of questions
And now I truly believe I've learned a good lesson
Although life hasn't been fair to me
I still have the will to care and share freely
I'm done with the shame and the feeling of pain
I wish to forget the game!

-James B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What does it take to exercise that will you've discovered within yourself — the will to care and share freely, the will to overcome the pain of the game? Maybe it's not possible to forget the game, but is it possible to use its memory as a lesson about the life you don't want to lead? All your questions may not yet be answered — they may never be — but it seems that the questions are pointing you towards a different way of living. What will it take for you to leave the game behind? What sacrifices will you have to live a different life?

Breaking Into Houses

Breaking into houses, is what I'm in the system for. My friends and peer pressure is what got me doing this crime.

My first time hitting a house lick, was exciting. My first house lick made me want to hit more houses, because I found hella coo' things in the house that I liked. When I'm in a house, it makes me happy, because we find so many things, and sometimes lots of money.

One time we were in a house and my adrenaline kicked in. We all scattered through the house and found our own way out. Then we all meet up and just laugh, 'cause the feeling of getting caught but getting away, is a good feeling; plus, in the future me and my friends could bring it up and have a good laugh.

House licks is a dangerous game to play. It might be fun at first, but when you get caught — it's a wrap for you! Look at me, my first time in the system and I'm at Camp. House licks ain't no joke to the judge; now they take it serious.

-Peanut, 150 Crew

From The Beat: In recovery from drug addiction, they warn addicts about the dangerous effect of "war stories" — that it can get the craving going again. We know you've been doing a good and serious program, but we can feel your nostalgia for the rush of hitting a lick and getting away with it. However, the end of your piece reminds that time is a continuum, and your incarceration is a consequence and continuation of that time.

My Life

my life is all jacked up
every time i call my family
they don't answer
or every time i call my girlfriend
she starts talking shhh
every time i go out of the house
it's like i'm gonna get robbed

-Chris, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You deserve better. And if you stay with a positive plan, as you get a little older — you will earn yourself a better life. Keep your head up, young man; and do all you can.

Love-Torn

i shed so many tears
i've lost so much blood over you
so when yes i said when
will the tears stop
spilling like a waterfall
i said when
will the blood stop
flowing like an ocean
or what maybe
it just might not stop
will it because
you will not stop
messing up my life
you come in and out
in and out of my life
like it is nothing
but it is something to me
yes it is a big thing to me
it is my life
but does that matter to you
no i think not
because you step in and step out
and come in and go out
like i am just a nothing
still you say forget me gypsy
what was once will never be
but i say why is it because of me
or is it you i think it is you
i remember you once saying
— gypsy i love you
but i am gone for one minute and
what you do not want me no more
but when i move on who
comes running gypsy please i love you
who — but i guess that is just you

-Gypsy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your relationship with her, sounds like a long and winding road, where every turn leads to another. We don't know her, but we know you need to straighten out your life if you want love to last. But first you have to straighten out your thinking. As an exercise, try writing a story about yourself with no exaggerations, lies, fabrications, and no hiding from the truth. Tear it up when you're done if you want to, but you practice telling the plain truth. Also, did you know you could be as talented a writer as you are a talker, with or without truth — but you need truth in your life if you want to stay free.

Started When I Was Eleven or Twelve

It all started when I was about eleven or twelve years old. When it all started, I was living on the block — and all I seen was people getting money all day, every day.

It was every day, I came out the house and all I would see is people selling drugs. So when I was getting older, I was like, "I can do drug sales too!"

So, at first I was looking out for five-oh for the older people on the block for fifty dollars. So I was keeping all the money I made then, until I could buy some drugs. Then I was the new boy on the block! So I was selling drugs, too!

My mother was having a hard time taking care of four kids by herself. So it was very hard for my mother, not being able to give us everything that we wanted. So I started selling drugs.

-Lil' V, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You make the story sound so clear and simple, and that's exactly what it must have felt like back when you were eleven or twelve. Now you're older, and you're just beginning to get a taste of the price you'll have to pay if you keep living like a thug, posted up on the block selling drugs. And it's equally clear your mother can't be happy now with you in here.

When I Was Born

It all started when I was born. Everybody was drunk or high at the doctor's. They should have known what was going to happen.

When I was seven, I started smoking cigarettes. At eight, I started to smoke weed. About the same age, I started drinking and stealing stuff from stores. I stole everything and anything. I would sell it to the older homies so I could get my own money; or I would just keep it if I liked it.

I used to take orders and go get it, to make money. I then started to steal stuff out of cars, then on to keys, and selling them. By the time I was twelve, I started to get caught for the stealing. So I switched my game and started to learn how to sell bomb. I've stuck with that since then. I still been stealing, but just kept it on the low and to the minimum.

I started so young, because that is what I saw in the game that made money. I needed money at that age to buy clothes and other stuff I wanted that I could not buy or steal. I would also save up to buy certain things or for stupid stuff that was too little to steal. I learned that when you go for something little, such as candy or toys, you get caught up. So I wouldn't do it.

The thing that made me turn to this was my environment. I barely had parents at home. Brothers and sisters were trying to raise me the best they could, 'cause I would never listen to them anyways. When mom or pops was around, I would be so good, so that they would not get mad at me.

I was steady getting into fights, because people would cap on me — so I would hit them. They still didn't stop till I got older and earned my respect on the streets; plus I learned how to blow that stuff off.

I started putting in work for the block in the seventh grade. Then I got jumped-in in the middle of eighth grade. My cousins and uncles are in, so it was only right.

I'm trying to get myself together right now. I'm working hard. I will never turn my back on the 'hood. I'm going to put my work that I got to do on the low though. Well, I'm out. That's just a little about me. Stay up, don't stress the small stuff.

-Crazy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You give clear-eyed portrait of your career in crime, from the age of eight. However, you interestingly begin with the drug abuse that surrounded you even at birth. Moreover, you mark your criminal activity as beginning simultaneously with your smoking weed and drinking alcohol. We won't summarize your entire piece, it speaks very well for itself, but we will note that since you've been incarcerated, you've been clean — and your thinking has cleared considerably, and along with clear thinking has come mature insights into what you want from life in and how to get it. We expect you to continue down this path of sober thinking at ROP, but when you've graduated with various degrees and certificates in hand, will you go back to drugging, knowing its pernicious effect on your life? Perhaps you can make a decision to go that first year totally clean, in order to facilitate your transition into living responsibly and free. Then, when you've experienced success for a good period of time in your "square" life, you can decide if you want to jeopardize stability and success by getting involved with drugs again. But that's looking pretty far down the road. Congrats on your success thus far, mental and emotional; though it hasn't been tested yet on the outside, the change is monumental on the inside.

I'm trying to get myself together right now.

Might Get Out

Hey, Beat! It's me, Gypsy! I was supposed to go to Camp on Wednesday, but someone got put in front of me — and now I am trippin' 'cause I don't know what to do!

I feel now like I am going crazy, really crazy! I am still sitting and praying to get out and go to Camp. If I do get out tomorrow, I will be the happiest person in the world! I can't wait to get out!

And to Danny Boy, stay up, man, and pray. And do what you got to do to get out. Danny Boy, I might get out very soon, so pray for me! I been prayin' for you. Hopefully you get out in good time.

And for The Beat, I've been thinking about life, and life is nothing without being free. If we are not free, what is it worth living for? See, if I don't get out soon, I feel like I can't go on — like I have no will to go on. And that is what I feel like right now!

So maybe, just maybe, I just might make it out. But I know I can get the will power to go on! At least I hope I can. That's about what I got for now.

-The Gypsy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: All feelings pass. You know it's true, if you think about it. So hold onto that, when you feel overwhelmed with despair or anxiety or rage or whatever emotion is blowing you off the page. Then take that insight about freedom, and use it to make better decisions than you did in the past. Both at Camp and on your home pass, make your freedom last — not with a so-called tighter game but with a clearer brain!

I've thought a lot about what I was doing on the outs

When I Started Drugs

It all started when my friend moved in across the street from me. I didn't know him at first, but I got to know him.

Before I knew him, I was a good kid and didn't get in trouble. Before I got to know him and kicked it with him, I never did drugs. After I met him, he got me started on smoking weed and meth — back then I thought it was fun! But now I realize it's not; it's just killing me faster.

Now look where I've ended up at, Juvenile Hall, and going to Camp Sweeney. Since I have been up in here, I've thought a lot about what I was doing on the outs; and when I get out again — I am not going to do drugs! It's not the life for me, or for anybody!

When I get out, I am going to college so that I can have a good-paying job that's not illegal. I am changing my ways, starting now!

-Lil' Mike, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Being clean for a minute, has allowed you to recover clear vision, and you see that what you thought was fun to do, was doing you. Let this fall to incarceration in the Hall and a release to Camp Sweeney, be your bottom. You need go no lower. But it will take more than a decision to stop, it will take determination and daily practice. But you can do it, and those home passes will let you prove it, to others and yourself.

Life On These Oakland Streets

It's rough. You gotta watch your back. You're gonna need some homeboys. You need a set. If you're a hustla, you're gonna need a queen.

I don't like living in East Oakland anymore. It's hard. It's hard being a teenage Chicano in California. The police always think you're a gang banger. They always assume.

But luckily, I'm going to live in Marin County in some group home for about six to nine months. And by then, my moms will be living in San Leandro.

I hope that soon my sister will move out of East Oakland to live in San Leandro, because I don't want my nieces and my nephew raised in these East Oakland streets like me. It's tough. (RIP Lil' Gallo.)

-Lil' Hot Sauce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You never let us read your pieces when we're in the workshop, but you know what? That's cool, 'cause we are just so happy to get to read your pieces later — and to share them with all Beat readers. This one is from the heart, and it says a lot about the street and what you and your family need.

The Hall Ain't the Place

the hall ain't the place
where i want to be

locked up in my room for twenty-two hours
seven days a week

ninja i'm up in my room
playing cards for county treats
laying on my mattress thinking

what's the next meal i'm gonna eat

man this trash is stressful an' it cause pain
on the outs i watch scarface

they got us in here watching air bud an' purple rain
when they tell you to get on yo' square

man i try to do my best

'cause if you don't they will have you lock' up in yo' room
to you see gray hairs up on you' chest

when ms. wingate tell you to stop talking
that's what she really mean'

'cause she'll have you in yo' room
till yo' white bread turn light green

and moe he don't really do no joking
start acting like a ass an' he gon' say

what yo' mama was smoking

-Brittan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You should have read this one out loud; it for sure would have pleased the crowd — even though it's really nothing to laugh about, sometimes you've got to laugh to let go of the stress. Then when you're done with laughing, think about doing your best after you're outside the Hall, and we don't mean a "tighter game" before you fall — we mean a better way to live.

**It's hard being a teenage
Chicano in California. The
police always think you're
a gang banger.
They always assume.**

My Double-Faced Life Style

The real problem is my double-faced life style. On one side, I am Sho-Moe Ine P—, the potentially productive citizen.

And then there's the Sho-Moe that's not me. He's someone deep inside me that dwells on my short-comings and my torturous past, and he can't move forward! So this side of me, does what he feels and doesn't care about consequences.

It's hard trying to be two of me. But it's also hard trying to shake the me that has gotten me through the hard times. How can I just turn my back on him when he's gotten me through so much? But he brings me day by day and play by play.

But I got to finally let him go. Let him rest. I am not gonna let go of him till I leave the system though, because he is needed behind these walls of pain, hatred and suffering.

-Sho-Moe, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Don't let him go, embrace him; give him what he really wants (not what he thinks he wants). Let him appear as a monster in your dreams, and there give him gifts of love and self-esteem. He must learn to forgive the sinner, not the sin, before he can let go and you can move on again. Accept him, forgive him, love him. But don't listen to him — don't let hate win!

**on the outs i watch
scarface
they got us in here
watching air bud an'
purple rain**

9 Things I Learned So Far

1. Material things no longer matter to me, because I can't take anything with me when I go six feet under — nothing but my body, soul and spirit.
2. That very few men or women will be waiting on you if you are in jail for a long time. They most likely will move on, sooner or later, because they will soon get lonely.
3. You can't truly love anyone until you love yourself. And if you don't love yourself, then you don't love God. And God is love, because He created us all out of his own love.
4. Life is only what you make it.
5. Honor your mother and father, because you will only get one mother and father.
6. God didn't promise a fair life, but He did promise death and taxes.
7. Life is too temporary to waste.
8. Trouble don't last always.
9. Do not lie, 'cause someone will always know exactly when you're lying. Even if it's just God, somebody will know.

-Gloria, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing your wisdom and insight. You've given us a lot to think about when we go to sleep at night and when we wake up in the morning. In a way, you've given us nine tools for our spiritual tool chest, to help us fix our lives; one day at a time.

God Is My Savior

In my life, God was there from the start. He has given me a lot of chances to think about it. But when I get in trouble, I pray to God and He saves me.

Now I'm in deep stuff, but God knows the truth and nothing but the truth — ain't no lie in this. That's why I pray every day and almost every hour-and-a-half. I pray to him to save me from this — because I'm getting blamed for something I didn't do!

That's why I pray to the Man upstairs to please help me with my case, because they're trying to pin this on me! But if He could hear me: I'd like to thank you for being in my life. But I pray to the Lord to please help me.

I am asking you for your help, to please help me in every little way. Don't let the judge just look at me and just want to already throw the book at me. But, please, let him believe me, because I am telling him the truth.

But I pray for forgiveness. I pray for my family. I pray for blessing. And I pray for my release. Lord, you know and I know that I didn't do anything — but they are trying to pin this on me! But if you can hear me, I pray that you look after my family and please protect them.

But foremost, I pray that you help me change my life, so that my mother could be happy. And I pray, Father, that you help me in my court day, that you help me beat this case — or let the charges be dropped or dismissed.

But I have learned from this that I won't come back on this road. But please forgive me. And thank you. Amen.

-Simon, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Prayer is a powerful tool, and if rightly directed, will carry you through whatever you have to face. But start adding to your prayers what you are willing to do, rather than just asking God to help you. What are you ready to do to change your life if you go free? God helps those who help themselves. So how do you plan to help yourself when God gives you a chance?

Started When I Was a Lil' One

What's crackin'? This me, Young Gato. Well, gangbanging' all started when I was a lil' one. Growin' up in Decoto, that's the way shhh is.

I didn't choose banger', it chose me, if you know what I mean. It's just the way I was brought up in my varrio. Me, as a lil' cholo runnin' around the 'hood actin' a fool, banger' on anyone.

Pretty much everyone around me is banger' or was. Like my mom used to bang, and my aunts. My cousins all bang, and my pops, too. Like a homie said on track, "It's not just the way of life, it's my soul."

I remember the times when me and the homies be postin' on the main, soakin' on some King Cobra's. Now I'm a lil' older, still doing the same thing, but a little more serious.

Now I'm paying the price, doing the time, missing my familia and homies because of the mistakes I made in life. Hopefully things get better, but I just have to see.

-Young Gato, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If banger's in your soul, then you have some soul-searching to do — and your life depends on how deep you're willing to go. You say that you're doing time for your mistakes, but everybody makes mistakes. If you're on a job and make a mistake, your boss may get mad for a minute. If you're a banger and you make mistake, you lose your freedom or your life. Yet you still want to be one of those "real G's" — that leave behind fatherless families and sons who want to be just like them.

Baby, I Love You

baby i love you why
are you playing these games with me
baby i love you with all my heart
my heart hurts behind this baby
i never meant for this to happen
i know you hurt behind this
please forgive me baby
every day i think about you
even where i'm at — i love you
but i'm sorry i know i don't
want to love you no more
i been thinking 'cause i'm in jail
because of you i made a big mistake
what happened —
you're no good for me
so all i got to say is good luck
so bye-bye
you know i still love you

-Danny Boy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your poem is full of the confusion of love gone wrong — pain, hurt, remorse, and even a little recrimination. It all makes sense, given what you're facing. Get out of the fast lane in which you've been racing. Love will only stay, when a new life style you're embracing.

**I'm in deep stuff, but God knows
the truth and nothing but the truth
— ain't no lie in this.**

A Few Of My Problems

What the real problem right now is — is being locked up! That is the real problem that I have right now. I have a lot more problems, too, outside these walls, like not being able to provide for my daughter and future wife.

This trash makes me hella mad, being locked up! I don't see how I've been locked up for the past seven months and just been able to keep cool! Like, sometimes I just sit back in my so-called room and just say to myself, "Man, I can't believe I've been here this long and still don't know how much time I have to do!" Like, "Man, I been here this long and can't go home yet!" It's like, "Man, how much time do you want me to do?"

I just pray the judge will let me stay here until I turn eighteen — and then he'll give me that straight release home, and not a release to Santa Rita! Because if I went to Rita, I would be hella mad! So, that's one of my biggest problems, trying to get the judge to let me stay here for a little while longer — and then go home!

So it's about that time, to put this letter to an end. So, until next time — I love you Gabriella and Maressa. All right then, I'm out.

-Matt, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We feel you on the intensity of your desire to walk free when you turn eighteen, and we wish you the best! yet remember that even if you go free straight from the Hall, whether it's really the best — depends totally on how you handle yourself in the free world! From our experience, the real problem is making deep and real changes in the way you live your life: thought processes, life style, behaviors; how you handle your emotions, for example, if you get "hella mad" at a bad turn of events, how will it get played out? Productively? Destructively?

**Man, I can't believe I've been here
this long and still don't know how
much time I have to do!"**

Getting Mad

What's the real problem? The real problem is when I get mad I can't control myself and I will try to hurt anybody I am mad at and I don't know why I am like that. I have talked to a lot of people about my problem and the stuff they were telling me to do, I will try it and it will never work.

But when I came to the Hall and got in behind one of those doors, I started thinking about a lot of stuff and I found out that I had to change myself and I made up my mind to calm down and think before I do something.

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's good that you are willing to calm down and control your anger, but you still should try to find out where all this anger is coming from. Then you can deal with the real problem. Understand the roots of your behavior and you can change your behavior.

I Played A Stupid Game

I played a stupid game; I started to sell dope to survive.

I've been in this lifestyle for a while so I've always seen it. It felt good to get the quick money, but when I got caught up, everything changed.

Now I'm pregnant sitting in juvenile hall. I almost lost my child last night 'cause of stress, I have a release on EM, but there are a lot of complications, that are stressing me out.

I wanna get out so I can buy things for my baby, and take good care of my child. But people act like they don't want me outta here.

I'm sad because my child's and my life is in someone else's hands, and I don't find that fair. I have to live for myself for a very long time, now my freedom is up to some one else.

When God looks down on me he see unloved, confused lil girl who craves just for someone to care about her and be free so she can turn her life around.

The real problem is my patience. I cant be patient when I don't know what's goin on, with the most important person right now and that's me and that I wanna be free again.

I can't handle this anymore; it's killing me inside and tearing me apart slowly. Everybody tellin me to be calm and cool down, everything will happen. But it's hard to feel the way I feel right now, it seems like no one has ever cared about me, now all they care about is keeping me here.

It seems like yet again I'm all alone and no one cares. I would rather be dead and have never felt like that. But God is the only person who cares right now so why not be with him.

-Miniona, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What is it that you want? - To be with God? Do you care about yourself? You are hurting right now, this makes life tough. But - you are pregnant. What a blessing! You are going to be able to give someone love, what a great gift you can give to someone! This is what you are lacking in your life. Things will get better. Be patient. You know what is in your future - a child. That's what matters? Right? So you have to do everything in your power to take care of you and your child.

I Was The Most Angry When ...

I was the most angry when my mother kicked me out for not having an abortion and I lost my baby anyways.

I was sixteen, in love and pregnant, my first love, first time, and first time out on my ass. It was the first time I was completely lost.

Everyone told me it wasn't my fault it died -- that these things happen everyday, and that it was meant to be.

But I don't blame me, I blame my mom.

-King, 150 Crew

From The Beat: King wow! Damn! - What a messed up situation. However 'blame' is never productive. If you believe that things happen for a reason, you will learn that life can be less painful. To hold all this anger and to direct it at someone or something makes life a lot harder. If you learn to accept things as they are, it's a lot easier to move forward. You will have a bright future ahead of you - If you choose. What do you think?

Neglect

My real problem that I been neglected and abused.

I feel certain things I do, I truly don't have to do it. Like the reason why I'm back in here, is because my violation. I stayed gone from my granny's house.

I don't have an excuse for everything I do, but this was my reason. I felt alone and depressed.

I lost my brother Aug. 25, 2003. It's about to be a year tomorrow. I didn't want to be at home because it has too many memories of my brother at my grandma's house. So that's why I stayed gone. I mean that's not an excuse, but I know I got to suffer the consequences.

-Mekamoo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: As long as you live you will have the memories of your brother - don't be afraid to remember him. It's true the loss hurts, but isn't it nice to remember all the good memories? The happy times, the laughing, the playing, even the fighting. Instead of mourning his death, celebrate his life. Know that he is in a better place. What is it that you can do with your life that would make him proud? Forget making excuses - think about yourself, how can you be that happy person again? Is it possible? We think so.

**when I was about 16 years old
I started prostituting, selling
my body to different men.**

A Big Mistake

My name is Kashauna and I made a big ass mistake in my life. Well, when I was about 16 years old I started prostituting, selling my body to different men.

And yes, it hurt me because I had ninjas out there pimping me and yes - I regret it. But also I chose to make that decision for going out there. I just have to say RIP Ania and I love you from the bottom of my heart. You are my angel.

-Kashauna, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It takes a lot of courage to talk about what so many girls go through, but so many girls are afraid to admit, and we appreciate your heart and bravery. Also, never ever blame yourself, but it's true, you have other choices, and your body belongs to you, it's not something any one else has a right to buy or sell. What do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror? We see a beautiful, strong, courageous woman with great potential. A woman who never needs to be hurt that way again.

you'll never know when you'll get the short end of the stick

Pizo

Ay homes just listen

I think the 5-0 comin', or am I trippin'?

I don't know homes, I been up for three weeks,
I heard a noise around the house I think ninjas tryin'
to creep.

I heard it too, go get the pistol,
I found the pizo, where the crystal?
As I light the pizo and take a hit

Right then and there my adrenaline starts to kick
My muscles tighten and my blood starts to pump,
Got the pistol in my hand, ready to let this ninja
thump.

I open up the window and creep out the house,
My eyes are wide open, and I got bad cottonmouth,
I see a shadow so I let one go,

Look up closer but it my own shadow though.
I know someone there; it's one of my foes

Creep around some more on tiptoes,
No one here but I take a trip around the block,
See anyone suspicious; I'll let my pistol pop.

Demons are risin' in me, in which I can't stop,
I stop at the end of the street and just stand there,
Then I realize I'm lookin' into thin air.

Nothing but house and parked cars,
It is three in the morning and I'm standin' in the
dark.

Peeps, I'm actin' just like the nocks I serve,
Wit' them too for the sales I get on my curb.

Go to the house and take me a seat,
I spark up something but ninja it's weed.
Hope I never go back to smokin' shhh,
But I will still sell it 'cause it pay rent!

-Young Smokey, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Crystal is a pretty addictive drug. But you see how much it messed you up, why would you want to mess up someone else like that? Can you find another way to pay the rent? We hope that you consider a new profession 'cause this one will wind you right back in here. You can't do the same shhh and expect different results. It just don't work like that.

Peeps, I'm actin' just like the nocks I serve

Mi Problema Principal

Mi problema principal es mi familia porque yo tengo miedo de perder a mi familia y nunca estar con ellos. Ahorita me encuentro entre dos cosas, regresar a mi país o regresar con mi familia. Yo le pido a Dios que me de oportunidad para poder estar con mi familia. Yo sé que Dios me va a ayudar, él es el único y mejor abogado. El problema mió es que estoy aquí y ni yo mismo entiendo porque estoy aquí. Yo he tenido muchos problemas en mi vida, pero este ha sido el peor porque se trata de quedar solo de nuevo o estar de nuevo von mi familia. Yo sé que Cristo me ayudará porque aprendí a tener fe en su palabra u por eso está conmigo en las buenas y en las malas.

From The Beat: Sea lo que sea que te pase, esperamos que Dios cuide de ti, de la misma manera como tú crees en Él. Amigo, este lugar no es para ti, sabemos porque estas aquí, y esperamos que todo salga bien en tu caso y permitan quedarte con tus padres. Y que todo te salga muy bien desde ahora en adelante. Procura de no meterte en más problemas.

My Main Problem

My main problem is my family because I am scared to lose my family and not be with them again.

Now I found myself in a sticky situation:
Return to my country or return to my family.

I ask God to help me and give me the opportunity to return to my family. I know that God is going to help me. He is the best lawyer around.

My problem is that I am in here and I don't even know why I am in here. I have had a lot of problems in my life, but this has been the worst because it deals with either being alone again, or being reunited with my family.

I know that Jesus Christ will help me because I learned to have faith in His word and that's why He's with me in good and bad times.

-Adelso, Marin

Once Upon A Time

Once upon a time there was a boy who became a man at the age of two. With no mommy, no daddy, so what was he supposed to do but to grow up and be another statistic? Not knowing his rights from his wrongs he ended up with the wrong people and started smoking weed, robbing cars, jacking until his karma caught up with him and now look at me... in jail serving time for something that escalated from small to big.

Now I'm missing my family, friends, girl friend, and life but the moral of this story is don't take life for granted. Wake up and smell the roses 'cause you'll never know when you'll get the short end of the stick. Love life for what it is.

-Lil' Y, 150 Crew

From The Beat: No doubt you had a rough beginning, but it doesn't have to end that way. You have the power to change the future; you don't gotta stay on this route. You know what's right and what's wrong now — what cha finna do?

Como Comenzó Mi Vida De Cholo

Beat: ¿Que tipo de juego estas jugando o has jugado?

José: Yo pertenecía en una pandilla donde el fuego te puede quemar, o sea puedes morir o conservar tu vida o terminar en la cárcel por el resto de tu vida, o la mayor parte de tu vida.

B: ¿Cómo crees que comenzó tu pandilla?

J: Creo que nuestra pandilla fue hecha otros miembros de mi pueblo quienes estan vendiendo el nombre de nuestro pueblo para que los demas veamos que ellos pueden hacer lo que todos podemos hacer unidos y apoyandonos, pero todo resulto alrevez.

B: ¿Te acuerdas cuando recien te metiste a este juego?

J: Sí, cuando yo me meti en la pandilla no sabia si hacer lo que me decía el corazón o los amigos, pero no pienso seguir jugando de esta forma porque prefiero a mi familia y no los amigos que pueden terminar como prisioneros la mayor parte de su vida.

B: ¿Dinos, que juego estas jugando y como comensastes?

J: Yo estaba jugando mi vida o sea yo era pandillero, pero ya he pensado muy bien y no voy a seguir jugando esta vida. Yo comence cuando los miembros de mi pueblo, me decían, “¡Ven, vamos a defender el nombre que tenemos, no seas miedoso.”

B: ¿Cual es tu problema principal?

J: estar encerrado en un cuarto donde no puedes ni siquiera ver televisión, ni hablar con mi linda madre a quien quiero tanto con toda mi familia, como ellos me quieren. Si Dios y la señora virgencita me lo permiten, muy pronto estaré con ellos, o tan siquiera hablando por teléfono con mis seres más queridos. Por eso le pido al señor que me ayude a salir de aqui.

From The Beat: Es la mejor decision que has tomado. Pues te apoyamos en ese aspecto, es mejor que ya no sigas jugando este juego porque puedes que llegues a terminar muy mal y eso no se lo recomendamos a nadie. Esperamos que Dios escuche tus oraciones y que puedas salir de ahí con una nueva mentalidad, no la misma mentalidad que te ha llebado a hacer tonteras.

How My Gang Life Started

Beat: What kind of game are you playing or have you played?”

Jose: I belonged to a gang where the fire could burn you, you could die, you could conserve your life, end up in jail for the rest of your life, or for the majority of your life.

B: How did your gang start?

J: Maybe other members of my town were selling the name of our town so the rest of us could have the opportunity to do what the rest of us were doing, together, and supporting one another. But everything went down completely the opposite of what they had planned.

B: Do you remember when you first started playing the game that you're playing?

J: Yeah, when I first joined my gang, I didn't know if I should do what my heart was telling me, or what my friends were telling me, but I don't plan on playing this game anymore because I prefer being with my family rather than being with my friends, who may end up being prisoners for the majority of their lives.

B: Tell us: What game are you playing and when did you start?

J: I was playing my life, better said, I was a gang banging, but I've been thinking a lot and I've come to the decision that I am not going to keep playing this game that I play. I started when the members of my town would tell me, “Come on, let's go defend the name that we have!; don't be scared.”

B: What is your main problem?

J: My main problem is being in a room where you can't even watch television. I can't even talk to my beautiful mother or my entire family whom love me a lot, just as much as I love them, but if God and the Virgin Mary allow me, very soon I'll be with my family, if not I will at least be speaking to my loved ones through the phone. That's why I ask the Lord to help me get out of here.

-José B2, SF/YGC

The Real Problem?

My friends,
my life,
my head,
my mind,
my mom,
my dad,
my block,
my body,
my dreams.

It's the world.

It's the gangs.

It's the cops.

It's me,

It's you.

It's the TV

It's the new G-unit.

Its girls,

it's the cars,

It's God,

I don't know the problem

Can you help me?

-Wg, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We think you know the problem. You've stated many problems that society and youth face daily. Understanding the root of the problem can help you to fix the problem. Can you make it so that your friends, TV and materialistic items don't influence you? Is the beauty of freedom enough to encourage you to be straight? Remember, your future's on the line.

**It's the
gangs.**

**It's the
cops.**

**It's me,
It's you.**

It's the TV

Juan's Page

Mi Padre Dios

Dios nos mira todos los días como sus hijos pero no todos seguimos los mandamientos que él nos puso. No entendemos la verdad. Nomás buscamos a Dios cuando estamos encerrados porque cuando estas libre ni te acuerdas de Dios. Por eso somos hipócritas, esa es la verdad. Yo les digo esto porque cuando andaba afuera nunca busque a Dios y ahora que estoy encerrado es cuando lo estoy buscando, pero ya lo allé, y no voy a dejar que me deje porque él me está cambiando mucho y me está ayudando en todo. Lo voy a seguir buscando con todo mi corazón.

From The Beat: Eso es verdad, no deberíamos ser así. Dios siempre nos escucha y nos hace mucho caso como para tratarlo así. Deberíamos ser parejo, dar y recibir. Esperamos que ahora que te has dado cuenta de la VERDAD, que sigas creyendo y llenando tu corazón de cosas buenas, y del amor de nuestro señor Jesus Cristo. Dejate cambiar de Él, que Él siempre estará por ti.

My Father God

Everyday, God looks at us like his children, but we all don't follow the commandments that He gave us.

We do not understand the truth. We only seek God when we are locked up because when you're free, you don't even remember about God. That's why we're hypocrites; that's the truth.

I tell y'all this because when I was on the outs, I sought God, and now that I am locked up, that's when I seek Him even more, but I've already found Him, and I'm not going to leave Him because He is helping me change, and is helping me a lot. I am going to continue seeking Him with all my heart.

-Juan, Marin

Nadie Me Escucha

¡Hey, q-vo raza! Soy Mousie de nuevo, y la neta es que yo me siento mal cuando no tengo quien me escuche, y más ahora que no tengo cerca a mi mamá.

Cuando yo estaba libre, las únicas personas que me escucharon eran mi mamá, mis hermanos, y mi papá. En ellos yo confío, y ellos son los que me escuchan, pero ahora que estoy aquí, no tengo quien me escuche. No les digo nada a los consejeros porque luego dicen que estoy loco y por eso todo lo que tengo que hablar o decir, lo traigo aquí adentro, y no lo voy a soltar hasta que encuentre a alguien aquí que me escuche. Talvez me voy a esperar hasta cuando salga para decircelo a mi familia.....

From The Beat: Que bien que tienes quienes te escuchan. Esperamos que cuando salgas lleses esa imaginación de que ellos son los que te quieren y que quieren lo mejor para ti. Es mejor hablar con alguien a quien le tengas confianza y que sepas que te va ayudar a alguien que tus palabras le entrara por un oido y le saldrá por el otro. Sabes, que no tienes que esperar a nadie para decir lo que sientes, sabes que aqui la gente del Beat siempre escucha.

Nobody Listens To Me

Hey, what's up my Brown people! It's me Mousie again, and to be honest, I feel bad when I don't have someone around to listen to what I have to say, and I feel even more bad right now because I don't have my mother by my side.

When I was free, the only people that listened to me were my brothers, my mother, and my father. I trust them and they are the people who listen to me, but now that I am in here, I don't have anyone to listen to me. I don't say anything to the counselors because later on they call me "crazy." That's why everything that I have to tell or say, I carry it inside of me at all times, and it's going to stay inside of me until I find someone that I trust in here to listen to me, or I'm going to wait until I get out to express myself to my family.....

-Juan, Marin

Todo Empezó Desde Morrito

¿Q-vo? Me dicen el Mousie. Y el juego que estoy jugando es el andar en las pandillas. Todo empezó desde morrito, yo miraba a los más grandes como tiraban crusin, y yo quería ser como ellos. Nos juntábamos en la escuela varios morrillos, y decíamos que era nuestro barrio. Fuimos creciendo y entre esos morritos nos brincamos nosotros sólo, nos poníamos unos putasos entre nosotros así fuimos creciendo más y más hasta que los más grande nos miraron que sí estábamos down, y nos empezamos a tirar tiros con ellos hasta que quedamos unidos y hacíamos los jales juntos. Si necesitaban un paro íbamos a hacerles el paro para lo que fuera, a picar, cuetiar a alguien. Teníamos que brincar porque queríamos levantar el barrio todos los domingo nos juntábamos todos. Eramos como 300 vatos y nos poníamos a loquiar y ahí mismo nos poníamos de acuerdo para hacer cualquier tipo de jales. Yo no mantuve el barrio, lo mantubimos todos juntos y lo seguimos manteniendo arriba aunque ya no estamos todos porque unos estan muertos y otros en la pinta. Lo que de morritos empesamos ahora todos estamos regados por donde quiera. Pues ahora estoy aquí pero todavía lebandando el barrio, eso es un poco de mi historia y todavía hay más.

From The Beat: Como llego a terminar el juego que comenzó muy de morrito y muy divertido? Bueno, la verdad es que no todo sale como lo piensa. Perp lo que no entendemos es como es posible que tú todavía digas que vas a seguir con el barrio, rifandolo cuando en otras escrituras dices que vas a cambiar y que estas aprendiendo las palabras de Dios. Tienes que darte cuenta que lo que paso de morrito ya pasó y que ahora por consecuencias de este juego estas haciendo tiempo. Piensa lo mejor de ti, de verdad te lo decimos.

It Started Since I Was Very Young

What's up? They call me "Mousie" and the game that I am playing is being involved in gangs.

I've been gang banging since I was little. I would see the older homies throwing up their gang signs, cruising, and I wanted to be like them.

A lot of little kids and me would click up at school and we would call it our 'hood. We would chunk it amongst ourselves. That's the way we grew up.

It got to the point that the older homies recognized how down we were. We would start chunking it with the older homies until we clicked-up and starting pulling licks together. If they needed a favor, we would go ahead and handle that for them no matter what it was, stabbing, or killing or shooting someone.

We had to click up because we wanted to bring up our 'hood. Every Sunday, we would all kick it together. We were very deep. Right then and there we agreed to be down for whatever, together.

I didn't run things in the 'hood. We all ran things together and we're still holding it down, even though some of us are dead and others are in prison. What we started as little kids has spread to the point that we are everywhere. Well, now I'm in here, but I still represent my 'hood.

This was just a little piece about my history. There's more to come.

-Juan, Marin

Malo o Bueno

Cuando nacemos, nacemos con nuestro destino hecho, porque antes de nacer Dios ya sabe quien va a ser malo y bueno. Ya nos tiene el destino preparado, mas ó menos así dice la Biblia. Yo les digo esto porque ya leí casi toda la Biblia. Ahora sé lo que es bueno y malo.

Cuando una persona nace, nace para ser bueno o malo.

From The Beat: Que bien saber esto de la Biblia. Esperamos que siempre sigas creyendo en la palabra de Dios y te guie a un camino bueno, te saque de esas malas influencias.

Good Or Bad?

When we are born, our destiny has already been predetermined for us because before we're born, God already knows who is going to be good and who is going to be bad. He already has our destiny prepared for us. That's more or less what the Bible states. Now I know what is good and what is bad. When someone is born, they're born to be either good or bad.

-Juan, Marin

Shavalier And Abbas' Page

God Sees Everything

my god sees my soul in clear vision
i know he's watching my every move
god looks into my soul and sees a beautiful person
an intelligent and beautiful young girl
i know that my god sees the bad and good things
in my past and present beings
i can't hide my action from this god
but i can show my god that i can respect him
and give his holy praises to him

-Shavalier, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is such a beautiful poem of praise, a song of faith and self-affirmation. To your words we can only add: Amen.

Thanks Beat

What up, Beat Within! I thank you for all the support you have given to the minors who are locked up. I respect and truly understand your love for the community. Stay strong forever. Thanks Beat.

-Shavalier, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes at the end of a night in the Hall, we from The Beat, feel lifted up; sometimes beat up; sometimes both. Thanks for your note; it means a lot to all of us.

Why You?

they killed you for
no reason
but i hope they
got that happiness
and joy the desire
shouldn't they think
that we all have to answer
to one god one day
but why you
i miss you
baby thank you for
the love you giving me
in the short matter of time
why did you have to go
so to those who kill
think twice
because other people have
feelings too
i'm missing my ecstasy
with my love' one
they say vengeance
is the lord's
and i hope you get
your revenge daddy
from your wifey forever
till the day we meet again
r i p — adi trills

-Shavalier, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What would revenge look like in heaven? Perhaps a killer's soul, stripped of its earthly ego, and standing before the throne of God, full of love and awe, would have revealed in its ecstatic state just how it feels to ache with love for the murdered one; to love and also know what you've done.

Drugs / Crime

what's the real problem
too much drugs / too much crime
there got to be a new way of living
i think if something came to an end
will there be violence and drugs
you would think that all the loved ones
and families that we lost
we would stop the nonsense
i can't stand the killing
the overdosing / the abuse
and the hurt-ness of the human kind
why can't we just get along

-Shavalier, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's so great to see you writing for Beat readers! You've always had so much to share in our discussions — your insight, you values, your personal testimony. Now a thousand readers can feel what you're saying. Let this age of international drug trade, end — and a new age of hope and peace, begin!

I hope Allah has forgiven me for the sins

You Are the Problem

What's the real problem? You, yourself! You are the problem. You are the one who causes problems in your own life and then creates problems in other people's lives. So stop causing problems.

-Abbas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We are not responsible for all the problems we face in life, but we are responsible for refusing to face them — and responsible for creating more problems by victimizing others in the name of our precious difficulties with our own problems.

i can't hide my action from this god but i can show my god that i can respect him

I Hope Allah Sees a Changed Man

I really don't know what Allah sees when he looks down on me, but I'm hoping he sees a changed man, with goals — and a good Muslim.

I hope Allah has forgiven me for the sins I commit and lets me enter Paradise with my family and my dad. I hope He gives me wisdom and cleans my heart of all impurity. Peace.

-Abbas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Pray like it all depends on Allah, and act like it all depends on you! You've come far, now follow through.

Lil' Tko And Lil' Mama Hanna's Page

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Cause Of My Childhood (Part I)

I was convicted in the womb at a young age, runnin' around the streets of Berkeley where moms ain't doing too good, and pops ain't nothin'.

See me, I was taught, "You don't hustle, you don't eat," so I had that mentality to get it -- how I like it, you feel me? 'Cause my bloodline was contained with pimps, players, hustlers, and drug-deals, so I already had it in me.

So, if you know me, you would say he gets money, but if you don't, you'd probably try to hate on me, but if you don't know me, now you know.

One thing I was taught before I end this was, there are three yards: The schoolyard, the graveyard, and the prison yard. Oh, and I almost forgot: My life is what I make of it, nothing more, nothing less.

Rest in peace, Kenny Mack, Ronnie Easily, Miguel, Tip-Toe and Zillion Cash.

Hated by few, loved by many, respected by all.

-Lil' Tko, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lil Quan, we hear you. We can respect that. But - Is there no hope for people who come from a family of drug dealers, pimps and players? You come from the streets - no doubt. You got street knowledge - take that, keep that. But don't let it take you where you don't want to go. You wanna get money - be smart. Use your knowledge in a hustle that won't get you locked up. Three yards - which one do you want to be in? The choice seems so obvious. Doesn't it?

'Cause Of My Childhood (Part II)

It all started from when I was brought out of my mama's womb. I came out to be a beast, and when I grew up, it was all-bad.

In elementary school, I was doing cool, but, when I went to Junior High, the script flipped there. I started runnin' them youngsters that we call "The Mob!" We were doing hella dirt, me, QB, Lil' AJ and others.

We were hitting licks and doing all types of dirt, but as we got older, the OG's kicked us some game and told us to, "Get ya' cash up" and that's been our motto ever since.

I touched my first zip at the age of thirteen, and from there, I raised. Trying my hardest to survive in the game, not to fall off, But that time came at the age of fourteen. I went to a Group Home, so you now know that if you want to be the cleanest, then you have to spend your money stack on clothes, shoes, jewelry, phone, two-way, etc. But I bounced back after I pimped that placement crap, and got my cash up once again trying to win.

But ain't nothing changed but the game, so I ain't gonna say no more.

RIP Hitman, Ronezz, Z-Cash.

-Lil' Tko, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What was it about the transition from Elementary School to Junior High that caused such a transformation? Was there a specific incident that happened in your life that 'flipped the script'? Where is this story going to go? Where are you going to be at twenty years old? Thirty years old? Forty? Tell us in your next piece about your adulthood.

Some girls enter the game because of their past. They have been hurt by the people they loved, in ways such as: sexual abuse, physical abuse, and even more

Dedicated To Ms. H

I've found someone I can go and talk to, who I can tell my hidden secrets that no one knows. And sometimes when life is rough, this someone tells me to stay tough!

When I get shouted at by staff, or irritated by peers, or told I'm wrong by teachers, or made to feel real bad -- this someone comes and gives me support and encourages me to do better. This someone made a real impact on my life.

Without this someone, I wouldn't have come this far. This someone made my nine months I have served here in Juvenile Hall, easier. And for this someone, I'm gonna become successful in life. I'm gonna miss this someone really much. Thanks for everything!

-Lil' Mama Hanna, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We've seen Ms. H with you and with others, and we think she's something very special. But nothing we could say would mean half as much to her as these words from you! Now follow through on all that progress you've made. And when you're on the outs, and it seems like nothing's going your way on any particular day, imagine Ms. H and what she'd say. Remember her words, and it'll help you through. 'Cause you're something special, too, Lil' Mama Hanna. So do ya do!

Prostituting Ain't It

I feel that prostituting ain't the way to live, even though/if you are in a low point in your life, where you have nothing to turn to and no one to depend on. All you got to do is just pray and keep believing in yourself!

Prostitution is real addicting! Once you enter the game, there's no way out, especially if you got a pimp. I think that girls that are prostitutes have low self-esteem and ain't got no confidence in theirself. But some just do it, too, 'cause they love the fast money.

Some girls enter the game because of their past. They have been hurt by the people they loved, in ways such as: sexual abuse, physical abuse, and even more. I believe that whatever you have been through, prostituting isn't going to solve it. It might even make it worse.

So to all who are in the game, try to leave -- and do something positive with your life. (RIP Jereme.)

-Lil' Mama Hanna, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for laying it out for our ladies in the Hall to think about and maybe respond to in our pages -- or maybe do something about in their lives. It is a tragedy when a young woman -- or a girl -- runs from physical and sexual abuse at home to physical and sexual abuse in the game; tricked out by words of love and/or flashy jewelry and clothes. And thanks for pointing out that "prostitution is real addicting".

I've found someone I can go and talk to, who I can tell my hidden secrets that no one knows.

Shadow's Page

Judge Not

must ye
yourself judged be
so stop reminding me
i can see
as it is that i'm weird
but being in constant fear
of myself of me
my depressive personality
seizing me at any time
makes me feel like i'm
unable to trust
but i must
fight myself from thinking that way
'cause today
i'm here to say
who i am and always will be
and i want everyone to see
nothing will ever change me
'cause we're supposed to be free
to make our own decision
so it is my mission
to be a different leader
not like anyone else either
to cut my own path
and the aftermath
won't be depressing

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Even from the grip of your depression, you rise to teach our readers a lesson. For despair is normal where you're at, prevalent on max — though each finds his own way to defeat, one day at a time, the demonic despair in his mind. And if you're different, weird if you will, then develop your difference into the skill of independent thinking — then escape the self-defeating style you've been living for a long while. Blessed with success, you won't feel so depressed. You made a decision, so complete the mission.

Stuck In a Big Fat Loop

my problem is that i'm stuck
in a big fat loop — hole
drugs have become me
i am trying but obviously
not hard enough to quit using
but when i tell drugs no —
they tell me no —
'cause they have become me
i give in
i'm thinkin
i'm not going to use
but that's the problem
i can't stay off 'em
they won't let me

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: "Just Say No" — isn't enough. You've got to say yes to something and — even then it's tough. Put another way, they used to say, if you throw one demon out and you don't fill up the hole with something good, seven more demons rush in, because they could. Did you try NA, working steps designed to help you help yourself change, day by day, in positive ways? You surrendered to addiction's tyranny, now surrender to a program of recovery.

**my depressive
personality
seizing me at any time
makes me feel like i'm
unable to trust**

'Cause I'm a Criminal

life on the streets
ain't as easy as it seems
being a teen
you know what i mean
breakin' into cars
just to get some money
and it's funny
'cause we're doing what we have to
to live and get through
most of our pains
with drugs runnin' through our veins
'cause we can't do legal things for money
'cause we dropped out of school for that honey
or whatever else the reason
and we just can't stop pleasin'
our cravings for whatever we do
whether it be drugs or gettin' you
when you least expect it
robbin' you just to get it
makin' that lick
to keep our families from getting sick
see people don't understand
why we do what we do and
lock us up for taking care of our fam'
whoever they be
you shouldn't be so quick to judge me
for takin' care of my family
and the way that i be

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You know we at The Beat don't judge you when we see what you do on the street. Yet that doesn't mean we think you should be pursuing a life of crime and drug abuse. You fell off track and it is hard to get back, hard to stay clean, hard to make a plan to change your scene. Life on the streets is easy to return to when you get released, but hard to live and hard to quit as any addiction when you're trapped in it. Instead of feeding an addict that's dope sick, show that it is possible to quit. But you can't do it alone, so make a recovery meeting your second home.

**when i tell drugs no —
they tell me no —
'cause they have
become me**

Shadow's Page

Nonsense

why is the world full of nonsense
 it's like trying to jump over a hundred foot fence
 that has no links
 and it has been jinxed
 so you can't get over
 even if you have a four leaf clover
 'cause no luck will ever help escape this
 bullshh that is
 truly what we need not
 like touching a stove that is hot
 you just don't know how it feels
 like the first time you steal
 you're going to keep trying
 and you're going to keep buying
 into this nonsense and lying
 so you're going to pass it on
 and it's going to keep growing like a lawn
 and it's going to keep going
 and never stop flowing
 until someone stops it
 but it's bullshhh
 'cause no one can stop it
 and it's going to kill
 and it's going to help fill
 the circle of life
 but is it really
 it is getting too silly

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your climbing a hundred foot fence with no links, reminds us of Zen koans, those unsolvable riddles designed to break your mind free of enslavement to the strategies of logistical realities — so you can stop buying into nonsense, regardless of what others think; stop living in the problem, start living in the solution, and maybe clean up a little bit of the pollution, or wipe tears away from one weeping child's eyes today. On top of a hundred foot pole with nowhere to go, and a raging tiger down below — what do you do? Jump, fool!

When Will I Live

when will i get to live
 'cause i have to give
 my time to trying
 to stop myself from crying
 'cause everyone makes me sick
 and everything they say will stick
 to me forever
 i will never
 hear the end of it
 until i'm in a pit
 six feet underground
 but now i have found
 that hate is part of living
 it just keeps on giving
 and i will never hear the end
 so my wounds i'll mend
 'cause they won't keep closed shut
 they just keep opening up
 'cause the bullshhh you say
 i wonder if there's a way
 for me to get through today
 not hearing any hate
 that puts me in a state
 so i feel depressed
 'cause the way i am addressed

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If there were ever a training ground for learning how to get around or through or over or under — hate, it's being in this sad place where everyone's a victim of the same fate. In every seat in every room, is someone complaining he/she is doomed to receive hate, then first chance they get to spit in the next one's face, they come with pace. Keep your head up, and try to find your way through this forest of hate, to a brighter day.

When

when will
 i feel
 the things that still
 make me happy
 i wanna learn those snappy
 things to help me
 to see
 the things
 that make human beings
 become idols
 like porcelain dolls
 'cause they are worth hella money
 i want the sunny
 day to shine upon me

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You've got to lose yourself to find yourself. For now, forget about monetary wealth and concentrate on your mental and spiritual health. It doesn't mean be always snappy and happy, but with truth and compassion, you'll feel less crappy.

Get Off My Back

when will i truly be free
 to be me
 how can i be
 what i like to see
 when people like to put me down
 and make me frown
 i don't know what it's like
 to not be treated like everyone else ike
 i just want to be
 what i know is me
 and for you to see
 i like how i am
 and i don't give a fluck
 what you thinkin' chuck
 so get off my back
 so i can play hacky-sack
 and have fun being me
 'cause that's all i'll ever be

-Shadow, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Day after day, keep playing your way with the innocence of fun shining bright as the sun — and they'll finally see that's the best way to be. Don't break, to let in the hate, or it will poison your fate. Just keep being you, play and stay cool.

why is the world full of nonsense
 it's like trying to jump over a hundred foot fence

"It' All Started When —"

1980

It all started in 1986, just a baby comin' out the womb. I had no idea I would ever be in jail or be committing crimes to become incarcerated.

Breaking into houses got me started. I really had no reason to do it, but all my friends were into it, so I just followed the crowd. I never really thought about what it would be like in jail until the first time I came in here.

Since that first time, I've been here nine additional times. I'm about to be 18, so, the next step is adult prison.

For me, this will be my last time in here for two reasons: For one, I'm going to change and be a better person. The second reason is, when next month comes, no more juvenile hall for me.

-Kja

From The Beat: **Damn! This is your tenth time back to the Hall. Is this the first time you've decided that you are going to change and be a better person? What is it about this time that you think things are going to be different? What makes you think that you can change? Step up! - If you really want to change, what's your plan? You may not ever come back to juvenile hall, but the next step in the justice system is worse. You're on the right path, - deciding that it's time to change. But ya' know, it won't be easy. Don't let the system hold you down like so many others in your situation. You have an opportunity here to make a change. Don't go to the Pen! - You're a smart guy, make smart decisions.**

How It Started

It's me, Lil' Pierre. It started when I was a youngsta, stay' wit' my guns up, quick to say, "Shut up! You better run up before I blow up! So what's up?"

I'd keep it real, pocket full of skrill, mout' full of grill. But now I'm locked up, ninjas on my jock — counselors tell me what to do. I'm waiting on Camp to do six to nine. I'm gon' complete it and be fine!

-Lil' Pierre

From The Beat: **Completing your time at Camp, is better than if you ran, 'cause there's no warrant out. But if you go back to what you used to be about, it's just a matter of time before you're locked down or dead. Think about change, and living free instead.**

A Real Life Young Hustler

What up to The Beat Wit'in! I a real life young hustler out here. I grew up in a hard neighborhood in Oakland that trains a ninja's head and heart from the start, feel me. I a straight young thug out here. My parent' don't do shhh for me.

I got this new girl. She' okay, I guess. I know a dude alway' be thinking he finna be with a female, then it happen' — she become a ripa (a ripa is a girl that f— wit' hell dude'). I just want my girl to be wit' me. I be gettin' hurt by "hoes" — and that' why I don't put my heart too close to this girl.

Fake friends turn thei' back on you a' snitch. I hate fake ninja! They don't want to see you getting money, so they pistol whip a' rob me! I'm solo bolo. I got hella partnas, but all I need is my nine an' a blunt; a bundle a' my girl — if she stick' by my side. I love this life. I would not trade it for nothing.

-Emmanuel

From The Beat: **You've already traded free life for incarceration. This is just a juvenile taste of the experiences you'll be facing, if you continue to live the way you do. And that's if you don't bleed to death in the street! 'Cause packing a nine won't stop a bullet from knocking you off your feet. But look back at what you wrote here: getting pistol-whipped for your stack, sent a message loud and clear. And why are you complaining about young women? Just who do you think would be attracted to the life you've been living? Someone as desperate and lost as you, that's who! We're not judging, just telling you something you already know. It's a losers game, full of pain; and it's time to let it go!**

Eleven

It all started when I was eleven years old. I started on a street in East Palo Alto, CA, watching OG's getting' it. As a young ninja I was fascinated, so I started playing with pistols and stuff.

-Kudah Black

From The Beat: **Kudah, look where this lifestyle has got you. You're older now and smarter. What is it that you want out of life? What do you want to be your 'life experience' to be? Do you want to be involved in violence? Do you want to go back and forth to jail? What is it that you want? There are so many different life paths out there. You really need to decide. We don't want to sound preachy. But, choose, it's your decision. You know where this/your lifestyle will take you. Where do you see yourself in ten years — and where would you like to see yourself in ten years? -You choose (before it's too late).**

When I Found My First Bundle

It all started when I found my first bundle. I was about thirteen years old, and I knew about selling dope. I didn't know as much as I know now though, but I learned a lot — and now I'm addicted to it!

I'm not able to quit because it bring' a lot of stuff to the table for me. I'm talking about stuff like: money, cars, females, nice clothes, nice shoes and all! But the thing about me, I keep my profile on low 'cause I wouldn't want ninjas plotting on me. Ya feel me?

The reason why I think I'm going to be hustling for a minute, is because I don't feel like I can work a nine-to-five, making only \$6.25 an hour. That ain't me. That's slow money.

-Brittan

From The Beat: **You haven't learned as much as you will learn about the corrections system either. You'll be hustling in the pen' for extra cigarettes, if you have good connections; but cars, females, nice clothes, nice shoes ... well, you might see a little between longer and longer sojourns on lockdown. In the end, when you spread it out over years, it'll be slow money, too. And you'll have no home, no family; or if you do, you'll be lucky when they write letters to you. Break your addiction now.**

When I Started Smoking Purple and Gangbanging

What's crackin' Beat? I'm just going to write on today's topic, "It All Started When." Well, it all started when I started smoking purple and started gangbanging.

The drugs made me do what I did. I had nowhere else to turn, so I chose weed — that was my best friend! I never had to get jumped into a gang; I was automatically in one because they knew my cousins, and they also knew that I was down to ride. All I had to do was put in a little work.

But once you're in, you can't get out unless the gang fades away and everybody gets killed. I know that won't happen as long as I'm here, because we are all a familia. We all watch each other's back. That's why we are all still strong, alive and banging.

When I was fifteen, I bought my first pistol, a thirty-eight special, for a bill. I rode everywhere with it. And slanging, I was never really into it, although I sold a zip here and there every now and then. Some cats like coming to the Hall, but I'm not one of 'em. I just do my time and get the hell out of here.

-Lil' Happ's

From The Beat: **We don't think anyone likes to come to the Hall, though a lot of bangers talk like it earns them stripes and somehow makes them more man-like or G-like. On the other hand, just doing your time, is no solution — 'cause if you go right back to doing what got you here once you're out, you'll get incarcerated again (and you probably won't get Camp). You need to use your time (not just do it) — for example, get a GED and/or high school diploma. Then get a job. It will both get you off the street and put some money in your pocket. And if drugs have you doing things you don't need to be doing — stay clean!**

The drugs made me do what I did. I had nowhere else to turn, so I chose weed — that was my best friend!

When I Saw Quick Money

It all started when I saw quick money for myself — grinding, that is.

Because my brother told me, "Bust any knocks that come by while I'm gone." Then he went into the store and left me to grind on the corner.

So I did! Only a forty-dollar knock and a fifteen-dollar, came. But it was only four or five minutes that my brother was in the store before he came back. So, after that, he started to give me the fifty-five dollars.

But I told him instead of giving me the money to give me some coke, so I could make more money. Feel me? He did, and that's how I started my addiction to selling drugs for quick money.

-Lil' Tay

From The Beat: **The first step to recovery from whatever addiction, is to admit that you are addicted. Well, that's half of the first step. The other half, is to admit that no matter how you try to play it, you always get messed over in the end. Those two admissions together, make up the first step toward recovery. The second step is to come to believe there is some power in heaven or earth, that can help you stop. Well?**

**thug life is crazy
sixteen year old havin'
babies
but stop livin'
life so lazy**

It All Started Like A Chess Move

This is the Byrdman, and since I've been in the game, I've been having up and downs. But you know what — that's how the game is. It's like chess: You have to play right, and don't make the wrong move.

Are you going to lose? Feel me, you have to play your cards right? I know when I get out, I really have to play my game right because I don't know who wants to hit me, but whoever does, they better try to do it right and not slip.

-Byrdman

From The Beat: **What does it mean to you to win the game? How do you intend to do it? Do you have a strategy? One thing about chess, or any other game for that matter is — the more you play, the more mistakes you make — and the better you get. Just like in life, you'll get better at making life decisions if you learn from your mistakes. What do you think?**

"It' All Started When —"

Livin' Life As a Criminal

The first time I ever did a crime ... I don't even remember, because there are so many that I did.

All I know is that I was stealin' hella cars, 'cause I didn't have nothin' to do at night time. So I went out every night and got hella stolos! And when I was in a stolo, and it ran out of gas — I'd just hop in another one!

Until the day I got in a high-speed chase with the UCPD and got caught and came to the Hall. And from the Hall, I went to Camp. And on a home visit, I was back on the streets doin' the same trash!

And I was getting all my crime in on the weekends — till the day I got caught again. And now I'm back in the Hall!

-Lil' Crime

From The Beat: So what will it take to wake you up? But then, it's not like you don't know. Maybe it's more like an addiction. Only an addict would keep doing what got him locked up with the little bit of free time he has away from being locked up — right?

My Life Now

It all started when I start hangin' around the wrong people — like my friends.

We were getting high and drunk and of a lot of other stuff and when we do that we start thinking negative like robbing people, playing with guns, slapping people with them and especially taking advantage of all the females getting all the girls high.

Sometimes we carjack — that's what I'm in here for and I was drunk.

-Lil' Marce-bo
From The Beat: You may be in the Hall for carjacking this time, but if you keep taking advantage of females, you just might be in there for rape. If you take advantage of someone that's under the influence — that's called RAPE. You must have no game if that's what you have to do to pull a female. You think you hard? Wake up — there's always someone harder than you.

Movie Life

It all started when I was a lil' kid, maybe six or seven, playing ball. Never thought I would be in the county watching 'hood movies. Seeing other kids grow up doing good. I was good at first but then I turned into a bad boy in the 'hood. It's not only my favorite movie, but it was how I was living.

Don't be a menace and I didn't wanna be, but when I got older I seen people get shot and crack heads, weed smokers etc. Never thought the world would become the ticket to money. I had my come up schemes like selling CD's but when I got older, I started selling weed — didn't do it long. I wondered what was so great about it so I tried it. It was cool; everyone said so. I was told you not gonna make a profit off anything if you sell and use so I started selling coke and then guns came into my life and I started robbing people and getting in little trouble.

It got worse. I think that the movies would show how bad it was on the street in 2001 and 2002 when everybody was wearing hoodies and head bands with people's names on them with a tattoo of a loved one killed by violence.

I think people wouldn't be in the Hall with me and I wish I could tell the future back then so I wouldn't be saying RIP Jerry.

-Young Zedd

From The Beat: Do you remember what happened to Kane at the end of Menace II Society? He got shot. All that dirt he did caught up to him. We know you don't wanna hear this, but you still a pup in the game. You still have the chance to turn things around before it's too late. Believe in yo' self and you can make a positive change.

High School

It all started when I was accepted to Berkeley Alternative High. I started smoking, robbing, and going to the Hall.

-Khyber

From The Beat: What was it? We're you unable to handle the peer pressure? Tell us more.

It Started With a Stolen Car

It all started when I had a stolen car, and then I found out it was cool. So I kept on doing it, because I wasn't getting caught up — not me, not all my ninjas.

But when we did, we started going to Juvenile Hall, Camp, YA! So that's when I just looked at the picture and was thinking to myself like, "All this shhh that we are doing is bad. So I need to get some act-right!" The end.

Psych! I was just shooting the bull. But when I get out of Juvenile Hall, I am going to make a big improvement!

-Lil' Ron

From The Beat: Who's psyching whom — but your conclusion is true, or at least it's what you need to do, if you don't want to continue your slide toward the Y, and beyond. You need to get some do-right, Lil' Ron.

Friends

I started when I stopped playing football and being with my friends. I got into car-jacking cars, and robbing bikes, and got into guns and cars, like cars on eighteen or twenty inch rims.

I would see a car on twenty's and go in it like it was my car. People would think it was actually my car. Sometimes people would look and get in. I will be good, ten or fifteen minutes, you will see no one by the car, you will say to yourself, I just see it. It is not cool or good.

Get out of the Hall, and get a job, and I got myself a car, jacking cars one by one.

-Jason

From The Beat: What? Sounds easy, jackin' cars. But, look where that has got you. Go back to playin' football dude!

Stay Out

It all started when I was a young teen — that's when I got started. I started robbing cars to jacking to robbing people to robbing houses. I was doing it all until I went to jail.

It all stopped my plan to get money. It was all I knew, but there's another way — it's to do right and stay out of jail.

-Bird

From The Beat: What will be your first steps towards getting your life together? What is your definition of doing things the right way?

It Started When I Moved

It all started when I moved from one place to another. In one way, it was for the better; in another way, it was for the worse.

The better part was learning respect and how to get it, as far as 'hood respect and fighting and just plain street life and living (how to survive). The worse part was being introduced to drugs and alcohol; and beginning to learn how to use them and abuse them — which then led to selling them and getting caught up in the game.

I always sold weed. That was my hustle. I could continue or stop. It's just all on me and what I want to make out of my future.

-Adogg

From The Beat: Okay, let's think together. You could go on selling drugs and abusing them, risking your life in a scandalous game on a daily basis, and getting caught up again for sure — this time maybe going to the Y, unless it's a gun case and you get tried as an adult and sent to the Pen'. Or, you could change your hustle, stay clean, go legit, get a job with steady pay, stay free (with your true love's arms hanging around your neck) and have a future that's fair and square: car, house, family, and so forth.

The worse part was being introduced to drugs and alcohol

When I Was Six Years Old

It all started when my mother died. I was six years old. I started to hang-out with gang members when I was seven years old.

The homies that I started out with was Spooky and Vago. They showed me the game of the streets, they knew about my mother, and they helped me out to get over here. It wasn't my fault that she died, but she will always be in my heart.

The homies taught me how to survive in the streets on my own. I learned a lot from them and my family because my family used to gangbang, too.

It's been almost a year since I started gang-banging with my homies, and I will ride with my homies until the day I die with my homies. With much love, for the homies and the family.

-Perico

From The Beat: Do you feel like your lifestyle puts your life danger? Is this the life that you are choosing? Is there another choice? Unfortunately, if your life continues down this road — the ride with your 'homies' will be shorter than you think. You don't have to abandon your homeboys, but are there any changes that you can make? Think about it.

It all started when my mother died. I was six years old.

When The Stars Fell From The Sky

It all started when the stars fell from the sky Without giving me a chance to say my last good-bye

Everybody got a start in their life

A person that makes you smile when they're in your sight When you look up in the sky at night

It's dark Because there is no starlight.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Nice poem. Where does it end? Where did the stars go?

"It' All Started When —"**Since I Was A Kid**

The game I'm in is gangbanging. I'm always known gang members, ever since I was a little kid. I've known them because of my cousin, and one day I started kicking it with them, and it was cool. So you know it got addictive and I started kicking it with them all the time. And then I was known as a gangbanger and that's how it went.

-Clumsy B2

From The Beat: Yes, that is the way it goes lots of times. Is there anything else you like to do that's cool and not so dangerous?

It All Started When

I was thirteen when I started selling drugs with this broad. I lost interest in her and stopped selling until I turned fourteen. When I was fourteen, I got put on by this dude and stole his dope and kept his money and got caught up.

I don't plan on selling dope anymore because I plan on getting a job and I have a boyfriend who doesn't want me selling drugs. He wants me to get my stuff together in order to be with him because he's grown and I'm trying to stay up on my shhh and not fall off like I did before, feel me?

-Danielle GU

From The Beat: Reading this piece is interesting because it sounds like you got into the slanging game more for the fun than the money. Do you know other folks who got started like that? We hope you really will leave all that alone and start working towards your shop.

This Is When It Started

Pops walked off on my life when I was only seven years old. Moms was out doing her own thang. I would spend much of my time wit' my uncle. He was out there dope dealin' big time, and I would see him turn sort of hard. He would tell me this was the way to make money nowadays. He told me he was a fox and a lion. A fox, 'cause he would seek out the toil. A lion to scare away the wolfs.

So about ten years later I would pick up his footsteps and go on to hustle mode. With that I would jack people and go on smoking weed and shhh. But just like my uncle I would end up in jail one day. So now here I am - locked up!

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: Do you think the environment we grew up in determines where we'll end up in the future? Why or why not? Do you think you'd be locked up right now if you grew up with both parents at home and you lived in a 'good' neighborhood? We believe that your environment plays a big role in who we become, but it isn't the only determining factor of our fate.

A Nut

It all started when my pops tried to get a nut and he got a nut, "which is me". 9-6-'86, a nut was born and my moms and pops didn't realize it until a little while later.

Don't get me wrong I show my parents respect for givin' me everythang they could provide me wit', but I wanna get my own stuff.

That's when I started robbin' people to get what I want. Went from robbin' to sellin' D. I'm gon' get back to y'all in a minute. To be continued...

-Young Fatz B5

From The Beat: How are you getting your own stuff by robbing people? The way you get your own stuff is by going out there and working an honest job. When you rob someone, all you're doing is taking what they worked hard for. It's almost equivalent to your parents giving you everything. Think about it...

The Game I'm Playing

The game I'm playing is gangbanging. What made me get into this game is my brothers and everything around me.

Yeah, I remember when I first came into this game. Problems that was going through my mind.

When you get jumped in you feel bad, but after it feels good. I'm playing the gangbanging game. It all started in the family.

-Pato B2

From The Beat: It's hard not to do what you see all around you. What makes being in a gang good? What makes being in one bad? Can you imagine yourself doing something else in the future?

The Game

The game that I play is slanging dope, weed and other drugs I have sold to people on the street, and I gangbang. It made me step into this game from friends, uncles and influences from other people.

Yes, I do remember when it started: I was only ten years old when my uncle brought me to his block. When my uncle got shot several times, so that's when my life changed. I didn't feel nothing because I just saw my uncle and I just didn't.

I don't like a girl to sell her body for money because that's not good because she could get sick. I didn't have a dream because I didn't see it that way, but I have done illegal activities. The game I am playing is just claiming one color and a set that I am in and that's it.

-Lil' Ghost B4

From The Beat: Lil' Ghost, we had to cut out some of the parts in your piece because we are not here to let anyone represent their gang. But besides that, you took the topic's questions on one at a time and we thank you for taking it serious. We do have a few questions for you: Do you think of where you'll be in five years? Do you still hope to be reppin' the block, slangin' and bangin', because most who look forward to that life end up in the Pen instead of on the streets. If you had a blank slate, what else would you want to do with your life?

Growing Up

It all started when I was young, growing up in Sunnydale seeing people kill and get killed. Then it was my time to grow up too fast.

So now I am gangbanging, robbing people, 'cause that is all I seen when I was a kid.

-J-Stub B2

From The Beat: We hear what you're saying J-Stub, it's hard not to do what you see. At the same time, some folks can see violence and decide they want to do something to end it rather than make more of it. Have you ever thought about what could change the way folks live? By the way, next week, please tell us what the phrase you've been putting at the end of your pieces means.

I don't plan on selling dope anymore because I plan on getting a job

Money

Slanging, pimping, and gangbanging — everybody calls it a game. To me, it's just life and the fact that I'm living in it doesn't mean I have to follow it. It also doesn't mean I ain't caught up in it.

When I was small people asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I would say I want to be a cop, but now I hate cops. Well, not hate them, just dislike them.

I don't pimp, even though females give me money for no reason, or maybe there is... I don't gangbang, but I do slang. Well, I did slang; stopped 'cause I moved away from the city. Did it 'cause it made me feel smart outsmarting the pigs. I mean I never got caught so it made me feel smarter.

All I'm saying is people do all this for several reasons, although in the end you always wind up with the biggest reason of them all...yeah MONEY.

-Baby J B5

From The Beat: You said money is the root of all evil without really saying it. Do you realize that? The biggest reason why people get involved with criminal activity is because of money. How would you get your money if they were to release you today? Is there enough courage in you to work for your money legally? From what we know you could be a hustler and still be legal. Do you think so? Why or why not?

One Reason

It all started when I started jacking cars and robbing people for one reason, and that was I loved money, whenever I seen it, I grabbed it. It's like money was on my mind all the time, even when I had a nice amount in my pocket.

When I was little, my brother always used to break into cars and take me with him, so that's why I started.

-De' Andre B2

From The Beat: Thanks for filling us in. Do you think you're going to keep getting your money life this, or could you get a job and serve your money addiction legit? By the way, is anything in life more important to you than money?

Work At YGC

It all started when the counselor walked in that I knew I wanted to work at YGC because I think that they got a lot of fine counselors here. Plus, I can beat up kids if they backtalk me. Then I can see the girls in B3.

-D-Money B1

From The Beat: Where'd you get the idea that counselors can beat up kids? Straight up — that ain't right. We think that a log of kids who are in the Hall would make for good counselors because they can counsel from experience. What advice would you have for kids if you were a counselor in the Hall?

Priceless

The first time I started slanging dope and felt that money in my hand, the shhhh felt priceless. Man, I'll tell you when I was younger, probably like eleven or twelve; I started hanging with the older homies. I used to look up to them 'cause they had fly clothes, money, jewelry, girls, and shhhh. And I used to see them on the block just getting they hustle on, so I started learning from them O.G.'s lacing me up on game.

I started doing the damn thang, stacking my chips and shhhh. It felt hella good to get some money in yo' pocket buying new clothes every other week having jewelry. So this the game I played, but at the same time this game played me 'cause look where I'm at now.

How I see it, this game don't last long 'cause you gone get knocked off sooner or later. This all I got for this week, stay up and stay out this place.

-Wiskey B5

From The Beat: Are you still interested in playing the game? If you were never to have gotten locked up, where do you think you would be right now? We appreciate the wisdom you have to look at both sides of what you were doing. But we're just wondering what will be different for you when you get out? How will you stay out of jail?

"It' All Started When —"

When I Seen My Mom

It all started when I was about eight years of age when I seen my mom sell weed, so I took a bag. I did know what to do with it so I kept it for like one year, and when I was like twelve, I got my first gun from my big cousin, and he told me I was mine.

I remember it was a little gun; I had it for like two years. I shot a gun when I was thirteen but I missed what I was trying to hit, and I think about it all the time.

I look back on my life and I like my life but how it all started was my mom was a hustler, pop was a hustler, grandmom was a hustler and my cousin was some hustler.

-Young Slim B4

From The Beat: It sounds like a cycle, and the question is do you want to break this cycle or do you want to continue with it? You say you like your life, but we're curious whether the life of the Hall (and of County, and maybe even of the Y or the Pen) gets factored into that evaluation — 'cause hustlin' with drugs and guns seems to pull people in that direction.

My First And Last Time Here

I am going home in two days. I am not coming back here. This is my first and last time here. I will go home with probation.

-Sean B1

From The Beat: Make it so, Sean.

Wish It Never Started

All this started when I was getting down. My folks was whippin' ass just to do it. I got wrapped up for pulling out a gun — that was the first case. I just kept coming back.

I wish that it all never got started. I can't act like a ninja proud of that bullshhh. I want to put an end to coming back. The first is when I get out. Alright Beat.

-III Will B1

From The Beat: How is this time going to be different? How are you going to make sure you stay out when you get out? What sacrifices are you going to have to make in the way you're living in order to stay free? We wish you luck, Will.

I Was Ten

It all started for me when I was ten years old. I grew up on Page St. I was always up at the park and I would see people up at these stairs always smokin' weed. I started getting beat up in fights all the time, so I eventually started smokin' weed.

I knew older people that I looked up to, so I figured if they were doing it, that it was cool.

-Sisaro B5

From The Beat: Do you still feel like it's cool because they're doing it? What has changed your views about smoking weed? It's hard to stay away from weed because it's so socially acceptable. However, we have faith in your ability to do so.

My Absent Father

I think it all started because my father never was a part of my life. So I started hanging with my ninja Tweety and he took me to his neighborhood and from that day on I fell in love with the block. I quickly was fascinated wit' guns, drugs, and money.

As I began to grown older, I also grew colder and felt more hate towards my enemies. That's how it all started. I'm going from roads to riches.

-O-Nasty B5

From The Beat: We never heard of the saying 'roads to riches'. We thought it was 'rags to riches'. But to each it's own. We hear a lot of stories about fathers who don't take care of their responsibilities. If you could say something to all the fathers who have left their kids behind, what would it be? Hopefully, they'll listen.

Alameda County

Drank Too Much

One day I was at my house in South San Francisco, when my homie Eazy hit me up a was all "What up Smokes? Get up. Lets kick it." I was like, "Let's do it." It was like eight AM and he came and picked me up at like nine something.

We smashed around our 'hood for a few minutes when we rolled up on a few homies. They was all, "Come kick it" so we posted for a few when another homie comes by and was like "Anyone want to buy a bottle of E&J brandy for ten dollars?" I was like "how big?" "Like a gallon," he said. He pulled out his backpack then asked, "Got ten dollars." "It's nothin' here's fifteen." I said, it was a brand new bottle of E&J, I was hella happy. Told the homies lets get drunk. Most of them were smoking and was like "I'm cool, it's too early, Smokes it's barely nine thirty." The only homies down was Eazy and Case.

Eazy was like "Let's go somewhere else to drink because I don't like to drive drunk." Case was like, "Save me some because I got to go to school right now." Case was one of the few ninjas in my 'hood that went to school. So me and Eazy cut out. We hit a downtown liquor store and bought some chase, some Kool-Aid. Then I hit up my homie from San Francisco Lil' Man and told him what up and to drink up wit' us at his house. He said to come over. So we bounced to his house and started to drinkin'. We started at like 10:20 AM, but me being Smokey started to drink on the way to Lil' Man's house in Eazy's car.

So anyway we all getting drunk listenin' to some cd's like Mousey, Speedy, Dark Room, Mac Dre, Dre Dog, Messy Marv, Woody and some Quinn. Feel me! Lil' Man like "Smokes want to play GTA3?" I say, "Hell yeah I do." So I start playing, running hella people over and shooting police and shhh in the game. And I keep on taking shots and by noon I'm ghost. Eazy like, "Smokey, lets go for a ride." I said, "Let's go, but first let me find my Newport." So I start to look for my 'Ports and find them in my pocket.

So we hit the streets and I can barely walk, Eazy like, "Post here, I will get the car." Lil' Man like "I got shot gun." I said, "It's cool. I want to lay down in the back anyway." We get in the car and I light up a Newport and I finish it and I fall asleep listening to Eazy's beat slappin' hard.

I wake up in San Mateo somewhere in Eazy's car. I was all, "Where we at?" Then he says back, "We in Mateo homes." I said, "How come we all the way down here?" Eazy said something, I don't know what, I was all, "Oh I see okay." And went back to sleep.

When I woke up I was back in Lil' mans house with hella females. I was kinda tripped out because I was wakin' up in hella different places. I was like, "How we get here?" No one said nothin', then I looked to my right there was this fine female next to me. So I was like "what's up? What's your name?" I think she said "Vanessa" or something. I asked, "How long ya been here?" She said, "Like and hour or so." I said, "Wow ya a sav'. You didn't wake me up or nothin'. Ya good." She started to laugh and she said, "Ya hella drunk!" I said, "Just a little bit." Then I got that feelin' like I was finsta throw up, so I went to the bathroom and threw up hella hella blood.

Eazy was like, "ya cool homes?"

Smokes: "Yeah I'm coo."

Eazy: "Ya need to go to the hospital."

Smokes: "Hell naw, I'm on probation."

Then Lil' Man brought me a new toothbrush, "Here Smokes, brush ya teeth homes, and the girl ya was talking to feelin' ya. She want ya to go kick it wit' her and do ya thang." I threw up two more times, brushed my teeth, and went to mess wit' the girl. So then like at one AM, I went home and went to sleep. Well ever since then my stomach been all messed up. Every time I eat or drink, it burns like hell. I went to the nurse, they say I got an ulcer and got me on meds for it. I

got to take them five times a day, just so I can eat and it not burn. I have drank since then, but not as much, mostly forties and shhh. I know it's dumb, that part of bein' kids, we do dumb shhh. I'm seventeen, 'bout to be eighteen in January, so I got at least five more months to act a fool, then I'm done.

But anyways, for all ya youngstas out there, don't drink that much. I been drinkin' and smokin' since before sixth grade, my body shot. I did it damn near every day, so if ya going to drink or smoke, do it wisely and don't do all that much. I'm just happy my lungs ain't went out yet wit all the weed I smoked and the packs of Newports I smoke a day. I'm ghost.

-Young Smokey

From The Beat: Yeah, if you drink too much — there are serious repercussions. What was the best part of that day? Does being in Juvenile Hall help you detox from alcohol, weed and cigarettes? Do you feel like you wasted a lot of time getting wasted? What do you see happening in the future for you? Are you gonna get back in school? Have you ever asked yourself the reasons behind why you drink? Understanding the root of the problem can help you to change your behavior.

Police

South San Francisco police know me by both names, Come here Lil' Nick, come here Young Smokey, it all the same.

Task stay rushin' like I sold they kids some came, Dippin' me and shhh, but like Mr. Kee, "it all part of the game."

When I had warrants SSFPD stayed harrassin' my neighbors,

But they didn't tell them shhh so they did me a favor,

Evidently caught me slippin', comin' off quad stack pill.

All up in the city wit' the sign on the hill,

South San Francisco, aka the Industrial City,

In my little town police show no pity.

South City K-9 unit move mighty swiftly,

Now if ya still try to run homeboy ya mighty witty.

They paid a fourth mill for Impalas super-charged,

South city ninjas can't outrun them cars.

Most my ninjas roll around in some beat up scrapers,

A few 5.0 but can't afford gas so we roll on vapors,

But that only for ninjas sober enough to drive,

South City PD wrap us on everything so a ninja stay high.

And just past in the alleys or wander the 'hood,

I be in my town

sometimes I be in San Francisco where everything all good.

Police won't mess wit' ya unlike in San Mateo County,

Where I'm from they try to get ya like ya got a million dollar bounty.

If they ain't got shhh on ya, they'll just whoop ya and let ya go,

Trust me homes, it happened a few times to me befo'.

Or they'll plant a dirty pistol an' dope on a homeboy do them cold

SSFPD just hella cold!

-Young Smokey

From The Beat: Are you proud of the fact that the police know you by both names? Do you always want to have it like that? Why do you think that some police are crooked? Why do they abuse their power like that? If you were a policeman, how would you act? Would you be a good cop? Why don't you tell us a story about a good cop? Ever ran across one?

"What's The Real Problem?"**Friend?**

The real problem was trusting the wrong friend.

-Andrew

From The Beat: How can you make better choices next time?

**Being
locked up,
sometimes
won't
change a
person.**

The Problem Is Kids With Nothing to Do

I think the real problem is that a lot of kids don't have enough activities to keep them off the streets; like after school activities, such as band, football, baseball, things like that.

Now that fewer schools have these activities available, more and more kids are keeping busy by selling drugs, or just being on the street doin' nothing — and that can lead to trouble!

-Danny

From The Beat: What you write is just plain true. But given our poverty-stricken schools, what can you as an individual do to fill your time productively? What will you do with your free time, now that you're going home?

What's the Problem?

the real problem is me
i run from me — i hide from me
and i get high to escape from me
so what's the real problem
— you tell me

-Lil' Tay

From The Beat: There's something inside you that you don't want to see: some hurt, some fear, some memory. When you face it, get through those bad feelings, and realize that it's not you or doesn't have to be you anymore — the secret that you fear is you, will die; and you'll be free to live your life!

Drugs, Friends and Violence

What's the real problem? Drugs, friends and violence are the real problems behind all my problems. But I could easily get rid of them if I wanted to — and will, one day, maybe sooner, maybe later — as long as I'm rid of them.

-Adogg

From The Beat: Easily? Don't kid yourself. It might be simple but it's not easy. If it was so easy, trust — you would already have done it. It's later than you think until you face the truth.

**if somebody
would help a
little, then some
of this would
not happen**

Being Locked Up

Being locked up, sometimes won't change a person. When you' locked up, it makes you mad, in a sense, 'cause all you do is sit in those small white rooms and do nothing.

And other people that's locked up feel the same way and bump thei' gums all the time — and you get tired of hearing that. So you start wanting to fight them, just to do something, 'cause you're bored.

-Lil' Savage

From The Beat: This is a tight little analysis of how being locked up can lock you into a cycle of anger and violence; and boredom's the pot in which it all boils up. But now, if you do learn to control yourself in these adverse conditions, you can do it anywhere, right? On the streets, in school, at home.

The Problem

The problem is -- when you're born without a lot of money, you're forced to hustle to get what you need or want.

It's nothing personal to the store, or the people. But if somebody would help a little, then some of this would not happen, because we would not need to steal food from stores, or take (jack) from people.

If somebody would just act like they wanted to help, a lot of this would not have happened.

-Kenneth

From The Beat: Kenneth, Do you know anyone younger than yourself headed down the same path you took? You've been through it —What advice would you give to someone who feels forced to hustle? There are a lot of youngsters out there reading The Beat; this is an opportunity for you to share your wisdom, to make a positive change in someone's future. In your next piece, tell us —What do you think are some alternatives to hustling?

The Problem Is East Oakland

I think my big brothers got me started in the life of crime from slangin and pimping, but really, it did feel good to sell my first bundle, and to make some money.

When God looks down upon me, He sees the Devil or something worse.

I think the problem is East Oakland, the crazy. I've really tried to be cool and stay straight, but I said, "What the heck!" And went to the street life.

-Jason

From The Beat: What the heck!? — Are you going to regret that decision? When you look at yourself what do you see? Do you see, someone that you are proud to be? The problem is East Oakland — How do you solve that problem? Do you solve it as your problem or do you solve it as a problem for all the future generations? Is it up to us/you/our generation? Is there an answer? —"What the heck"... solves what?

I'm Going To Camp

The real problem is that I'm going to Camp to do six to nine months, and I want to go home! But I still got to be up there for three more weeks, and I'm tired of being locked up!

I want to see my baby'mama, and see my mama at home, not at Juvenile Hall or Camp! I'm tired of being incarcerated. I'm going to Camp tomorrow. I hope I can pimp my program and just stay charly on the streets — and I don't want to never see Juvl again! So I hope God be with me, and keep me out of trouble.

-Diego

From The Beat: Being incarcerated feels like the problem, and the feelings real enough! But as you admit in the end, whatever gets you in trouble is the real problem then. And it's fine to pray to God, as Jesus did, to "deliver me from temptation" — not even Jesus wanted to be tested! But what you do, is all on you.

What's The Real Problem?

The real problem is -- I wanna be home with my family.

I miss them and I'm tired of the streets.

I'm tired of being sick and tired.

I'm tired of having to watch over my back wondering if I'm going to be like the next ninja leaving off in the corner.

-Elqueanisha

From The Beat: Your lifestyle is a tiring one, no doubt! Can this problem be solved? What kind of lifestyle do you want to live? Is it possible? Remember, your life IS what you make it — or envision it to be. What do you think?

Who Has Problems?

I have problems, because my being away from my family, friends and females I kick it with, makes me angry!

And my mind sometimes starts to flip! But my being as smart as I am, I don't let myself get into more trouble — 'cause I think about the consequences before I do whatever I think that I was gonna do.

-Lil' Savage

From The Beat: Anger is only a feeling, and feelings pass. Later you can say, "Man, I was tripping!" But if you act on it, when you catch those consequences, you're tripping all over again.

People I Chill With

The people I hang out with is the problem but I know that evil is trying to bring me down - now I see and now I have to believe that the demons is trying to take over my soul. Now, that I see.

I will not let evil take over. I will take the path of God.

-Andre

From The Beat: What made you decide to take the path of God? What will be your first step towards incorporating God as a part of your life?

**I think
about the
consequences
before I do**

Why I Do What I Do

i do what i do
'cause my mind's corrupt
my attitude
don't give a...
all i like to do is pop ees
and get drunk
khakis hang to the flo'
colors from head to toe
lookin' to go to war
i do what i do
'cause i don't care if i get caught
that's how i was taught

-Lil' Rickie
From The Beat: You were raised to live and die in the Pen', but it doesn't have to be like that, young friend. We know you care, even though your attitude flares on E's and brew till you act a foo'. And yes, we know you were raised that way, too. But it's time to change. Don't volunteer for more pain.

Change II

i want to change
as soon as i can
'cause it's coo'
to make a hundred
but it's best
to make a grand
can't live the life of a boy
it's time to be a man
tired of this life i live
seein' my folks die
in the blink of an eye
wonderin' if they're
watchin' over me
from the skies above
ain't even trippin'
off the tough love

-Lil' Rickie
From The Beat: Yes, their spirits watch you from on high, but now they see with spiritual eyes the living truth they tried to deny. In your dreams they'll visit you and tell you why you need to change. No lie, tough love from the sky!

When God Looks At Me

When God looks at me he sees a troubled juvenile mixed up in the wrong game and caught up in the system. He doesn't see me as a bad person who's made bad decisions.

I pray to God everyday and night to help me out and make better choices when I get out. I don't want to ever come back to this place. I just hope when I get out, I have the brains to stay straight and not go back to my old ways.

I hope God will help me stay on the right path of life so I don't mess up again.

-Dillon
From The Beat: God will help you out if you continue to pray to Him and be real with what you say. You do have the brains to stay straight, just recognize the things that got you where you are today, and remember if you do those things again where you'll end up, (in a small box cell). Pray all you want, you still have to perform. Your actions is what counts.

A Home Pass

Man it's hard being here. Now I got to go to a group home in LA. I don't want to go but I have to for six months, but I'm going on a home pass. I'm going back to Oakland. I'm going to call my wifey and tell her to come over and get high 'cause I can do that. So when I get a home pass I'm going to do my thing.

RIP Bee-bo, Ant, Greed-bo, JJ, Tank, Mikey, Thomas, Will, Gritey-bo and Charley Mac.

-Darnell
From The Beat: It's okay to do your thang when you get out, but not once did you say anything about spending time with your family or doing what it takes to stay out of the system. Is getting high more important than spending them few hours with your family? We hope getting high wasn't part of committing your crime. Think about it!

Grumpy's Start

It's me Grumpy. I'm back in this fake jail again. I got into the game 'cause I always wanted to be a homeboy so I started kicking it with them. Then one day I went to the Hall for robbery. Then I just started going in and out of the Hall.

If I could turn back, I would not change a thing. I started to slang when I was on the run so I could make a little money, but then I liked it so I kept doing it. But I stopped 'cause I got paranoid 'cause the police kept messing with me. So I kept giving them a fake name. Then I just stopped.

Other than that I would never change. I'll be a homeboy till the day I die. RIP Angel and Snoopy.

-Grumpy
From The Beat: Does gangbanging make your life harder than it has to be? What do you see happening in the future if you keep banging? Are you ready to risk being in a cell for the rest of your life? It's your move.

Love For Life

sabrina hi mama
i feel so corny
because i can't see you
and i lost you
mama i miss you so much
i wish i could see you so bad
yeah i miss you so much
i wish i could find you
do i ever have a chance
to see you again
see i always told you
that there is nothing
i love more than i love you
love for life when will it die

-Gypsy
From The Beat: You will find her again. But if you have nothing more to offer her than the wild and crazy life you were living back then, it won't be too very long before you part again.

can't live the life of a boy it's time to be a man

Sickness

i feel sick to my stomach
life is getting shhhier by the minute
stuck behind these walls all day
got me stressin'
don't know what to do
don't know what to say
i am just feeling like just sleeping
for the rest of my time
till they let me go
at night i think of things to do
not to get into trouble
trying to do the right things
i've been stressin' for months now
for now i will still just sit and wait
but when they say gypsy camp release
all they will see is smoke
coming from the bottoms of my shoes
well that's it for now

-The Gypsy
From The Beat: We're pretty sure that as you read these words, you're already at Camp — probably been there for two weeks or so, assuming you didn't run. Is that the smoke coming off the bottoms of your shoes? Chances are, if you run, wherever you run to, trouble will be waiting for you. So just chill, be coo' — give yourself a chance to learn something new.

Be Yourself

The Juvenile Hall is not a place that you want to be in. Because I know that there are little people that want to act cool. But you don't want to act cool in front of your friends — you want to be yourself not be other people.

So what to do is try not to show off in front of people, but be yourself.

-Marcell
From The Beat: Do you call being yourself when you committed your crime? Probably not, practice what you preach because what you said about being yourself is real, never front just because you might want to impress someone. You can only impress someone when you be you!

When God Looks Down...

When God looks down at me, He sees bad on the outside, but what counts is -- what's in the inside of your heart. That is what God looks at.

-Dark One
From The Beat: We agree with that. What is in your heart?

God

When God looks down on me He sees His son in the wrong place.

And when it happened He saw me at the wrong place at the wrong time.

-Andrew
From The Beat: Remember, God helps those who help themselves, so what can you do so that you don't fall into the same predicament again?

Toot Toot

well i was born in my birthday suit
the doctor slapped my behind and said
you're gonna be special you sweet little toot toot
— but he was wrong

-Picasso
From The Beat: After you've been where you've been and done what you've done, the specialist thing under the sun — is to change your ways, starting today.

God Seen...

He seen I try to do my best but now I have to try harder and I will succeed in life. Only God can save me.

-Andre
From The Beat: What is your definition of success? Do you think God views success the same as your fellow Americans view success?

Goals

My two goals are to be an electrician and a technician so I can take care of my mom and grandma so they don't have to work anymore. I will take care of them for the rest of their life.

-Andre
From The Beat: We really hope that you go through with completing your goals. Do you plan on going to college to get your degree?

when they say gypsy
camp release
all they will see is smoke
coming from the bottoms
of my shoes

No One On My Side

there is no one on my side
i can't trust no one
because one minute
they try to be nice
talking to me
and then they say i am ...

-Lil' Gooch

From The Beat: It is difficult to find friends worthy of trust in juvenile hall, but stay patient and you'll recognize her when she comes along.

I'm Getting Out!

What's up Beat? So, I might be getting out tomorrow. My time here though has been spent really well. I found God, and a lot of things I'm capable of.

Now that I'm here, I realize how good I had it on the outs. And now there are so-o-o many things that I wanna do! Like finish school, go to college, get a job, marry my girlfriend!

But one thing I don't want to do, is get put back in here. So I will try my hardest to stay away from temptation, and to be an upstanding citizen.

-Danny

From The Beat: You've got your head right, and that's the best start you could make on achieving the goals you state. Yes, avoid temptation; but if you find yourself staring it in the face, turn and walk away. And if you fall at that, don't give up the fight; just get back on track — and don't look back! We wish you all the best.

Going the Wrong Direction

When God looks down on me, I think he sees someone with great potential and a lot of knowledge — but just going in the wrong direction.

I know I'm a good person. I just really messed up. Now that I have God in my body, I know He will turn me in the right direction. He will look after me.

-Danny

From The Beat: Pray like it all depends on God, but act like it all depends on you. God helps those who help themselves, so you need to do your part, too!

Game Face

this place ain't no struggle
this place ain't really shhh
but in the long run
this place will make you sick
i see my family and relatives
but never my girl
man this shhh sucks
because melissa is my world
i've been sick here three months
counting all the time spent
waiting for camp
hopefully soon to be sent
all that i have is my game face
that stands strong
never to fall
and forever to last long
so all that i say is
i need to be freed from this place
but until that day comes
i forever hold and keep my game face
one love to my patnas in the hall
and my ninjas from fremont

-Adogg

From The Beat: That game face may help you get through this place, but if it's all you've got to say, to yourself anyway, then it's a terrible waste and a danger to your future — 'cause that "never to fall" belief, once you're out and free, is guaranteed to do ya! In a game that bleeds the weak and kills the strong, there's nothing worse than the curse of being stuck on the street doing wrong with your game face on. You will fall hard and long.

Never In The Beat

every tuesday when
the beat comes
i always get mad
'cause i'm never in the beat
but ... duh
it's 'cause every week
i never write
i'm always drawing and stuff
but anyways though
till next time

-Candy

From The Beat: Hey, this week you drew, and you wrote, and you read your writing out loud! And now you're reading your words in the pages of The Beat — sweet!

Released to Camp

Ay, what's poppin' with y'all? It' that boy from Hayward, waiting to go to Camp tomorrow so I can pimp it!

Well, today I received lightweight bad news about my folks, Lil' Leo. Some of you Beat readers may remember him. One of the folks told me that he ran from his group home, and now if he gets caught — CYA is his last resort!

-Lil' Rickie

From The Beat: Sorry to hear about Leo! But you know if he turns himself in before he catches another case or gets caught on warrant, he might still avoid CYA. It's really his best bet. Tell him to turn himself in before it's too late. We've seen it before, both ways.

A Lost Child of God, But Not Yet Failed

When God looks down on me,
He sees his child,
a lost child
trying to find his way
to Him
again,

trying to get back
on a better path.

He knows I've messed up
but have not yet failed.

You never fail unless you're not saved ...
by the time ... your number ... is ... called.

-Adogg

From The Beat: Are you playing with God's love like it's a game? The time is always now, never later — now is the time to change. If you're truly trying, you're already saved; but if "trying" is one more mind game, then later ... for ... salvation ... playa!

Tight

if anyone in the hall
thinks he's on a hype
and brings it to me
and starts a fight
you know i come
with a left and a right
even if it costs me
lockdown-at-night's
people got to know
if they disrespect
i'm takin' flight
— forget
tryin'a do right
i gotta keep
my mind tight

-Emmy-Boe

From The Beat: You can learn to do it with a look. Won't even have to prove it by the book. Just gain control of your mind, then let others feel power blaze from behind your eyes. Grow wise. Let others find in your silence a power greater than violence.

The Dee Game

i been bouncin' cream since my early teens
it' just another turf day for me
five-oh come hit the block i tuck my bundle
'cause i'm on probation
if they catch me i'm going back to the hall
but i ain't puttin' myself in that situation
'cause i'm trying to get off that trash
but the dee game is what paid me
i been sellin' dope an' i might never stop
but i love the game and i loved how it pays
i don't wish it upon nobody
but if your pocket get low
you better grind for somebody
'cause it' all about the dee game

-Moe Butter

From The Beat: Here you are in the Hall again, but you're imagining you're out on the street, tucking your bundle when five-oh hits the block! We imagine you getting caught again; and again. Can't you see? The life you're leading won't be about getting paid, but extended incarceration and pain! What a shame, addicted to the game — so you hit the block just like a knock.

My One True Love

my one true love is not in this jail
she lies in her bed until to her those words i tell
baby i'm free and ready to be home at night
that's all i think about all of the time
you're beautiful lips and sexy eyes
and no need to go into detail about your body or thighs
it's m'ami my one true love
sent surely by the lord who watches above
so for now i'll reminisce about your kisses and hugs
but i just want you to know melissa
you're my one true love

-Adogg

From The Beat: If you want to keep those kisses and hugs, you better stop acting like a fast-lane thug. Take a minute to think about your life, if you dream of ever making Melissa your wife.

Gypsy at Camp

I finally made it. I am at Camp Sweeney! Another four months in the Hall — but I made it out! Now I am doing my thing.

Wanting to go home, but that will not be very soon — because it takes three weeks for us not to get our first home pass. But I am not stressing, because I am not in that hell-hole no more!

To all my people in the Hall, what up! Stay up, do ya thang, and definitely — pray! I be praying for you, okay? Kick back, do what you got to do, and get out.

I've been thinking of Sabrina a lot. I wonder if she is okay. I really miss that girl very bad. I still love her. Take me out of the rain. I can't take this pain no more. Open the door. Take the pain away. You understand?

Well, "G" to the Hall, 'cause y'all used to call me "G" for the way I'd say Gypsy. Stay up. Peace. Out.

-Gypsy

From The Beat: If you're still at Camp by the time this hits print, then you'll read this and know we took out the Mudd Duck part. In the what we cut, you ask if we think you're crazy. Yeah, crazy like a fox! But we worry about you, 'cause it seems like, in the end, you keep outfoxing yourself — set up to fall!

The Worst Decision

On the Fourth of July, I got caught on the street. I had robbed these people, and all I got was eighty dollars and a cell phone. That was a stupid decision! I only got charged with one, luckily.

I've been here about two months. Hopefully, I'll get out soon and live with the rich, white folks in Marin County. Later...

-Lil' Hot Sauce

From The Beat: Maybe it's a good thing you'll be out of the mix and over in Marin County. Do your part, and it will be all good!

**I got caught on
the street.**

'Hood Views

What's good with all you homeboys here in Alameda County? It's me, yo' boy, big bad Young Gato comin' back at ya. I'm just chillin' up in max' doing my time like a G.

I need to be back out on the block in my varrio on patrol with the homies; or with my familia spending time, like with my lil' carnal because he really needs his big brother in his life. I also got four sisters, and I need to take care of them.

I can't do nothing for any of them, but I know I got my homeboy out there lookin' out for my familia, because that's how the homies do it in the varrio. Everyone is real close, and it's like everyone is related to each other.

So to all my homies, stay up and be safe. Don't let no one get you down. Keep trucha wherever you are.

-Young Gato

From The Beat: Big bad Young Gato on patrol, does not sound like the path to staying free once you get out; it sounds like the sort of attitude that keeps bringing you back to incarceration. What you need to do is get off the block and into a classroom - and to get a job. Stay busy and productive, 'cause you won't be much help to your little brother or your four sisters on lockdown.

To Someone Special

ever since i met you
i have really learned
to like you and trust you
that's something i haven't
been able to do with certain people
lil' b you are someone
who will always be in my life
and in my thoughts
and once i get my good release
i'm gonna stunt on these females
and do it live with your side by side
r i p lil' jeremee

-Lil' Mama Hanna

From The Beat: Make sure you stunt with your do-right ways; forget all that flash and trash that others make - and your friendship just might last forever and a day.

I Feel Like

I feel like breakin out of the hellhole.
I think of my family
I love my family.
I miss my sister N'Chon, my brother Thomas,
my mother Carol
Please believe it

-Chynal

From The Beat: Chynal, we believe it. The Hall ain't the place to be. Family is the most important thing in life - don't you think? How do they feel about you being in the Hall? How would they feel if you broke out? What would make them proud? What would make YOU proud of yourself?

damn, I messed up

God Sees Me Trying

When God looks down on me, He sees a young man at a point of trying! He sees a young man at eighteen years of age that been on the wrong side of the track.

My grandmother is up there, too, upstairs along with the Almighty now, and when they both look down they see me trying to turn around before it is too late!

I am going to apply the brake to the fast-lane life, 'cause I don't want to be sitting in Santa Rita County Jail when I am twenty-one. I know darn well they are just waiting for me to go to County. That's why I am going to Camp - to finish my program. Get, boy!

-George

From The Beat: Do more than just finish your program, use the program while you're there. Work toward a GED and/or high school diploma. And take advantage of whatever programs you can. Stay busy while you're there. For one thing, it makes your time pass more quickly; but it will do much more, too.

'Specially For You

bro' this is especially fo' you
we grew up together most of our life an' that's true
so if you did it - i did it too
when the judge let' us go it's cookies
if you feel me
it was a shame
we got disrespected in the game
i ain't trippin' you know why 'cause h k is my name
chillin' with bro' an' dam
smokin' grapes with light an' drank and playin' the game
while we keepin' our mind right
i will always be bro' riding with you
back to the town in the middle of the night
just to make sure you gets home safe and a'right
just to be there fo' him when a youngsta is tryin' to fight
now we locked up for a short period of time
it feels hella funny in jail writin' rhymes
forget that stuff i'm gon' get mines
everyone want to say our word
it's all jesus one love it's all jesus bro'
that's how i feel

-Hk

From The Beat: Smoking light and drinking all night on the grind, is not going to help you find your right mind. You're just telling the system to reserve a space, 'cause you'll be coming back to this place until you're too old to babied like this, and they send you to a place you really wish didn't exist. HK! It doesn't have to go down like this! Jesus gave you this chance to turn your life around, so you never have to hear the sound of chains on your feet. You write, "I'm gon' get mines" - but if you go back to the street and grind, it's just a matter of time before you get incarcerated, or exterminated. Not trying to hate, just educate.

Game Over

Well, for me, I'm not a person that likes to play games. I am the game. But I learned that if you play games, you always lose - sometimes you win and sometimes you lose.

But I have realized that the game is just there for sometimes. Then you will just move on to a higher stage. And that's when you like to add things to your games, thinking that then you won't lose - like buying pistols, being in gangs, something like that.

But even though it always comes down to the last level, most likely it always says - "Game Over."

-Simon

From The Beat: What do you mean by "I am the game"? Can you explain? It sounds like you were caught up in the game. At what level did you, or will you, get out? Or, if you don't want to call what you were doing a game, how deep did you get into crime - before they came at you with this crime you didn't commit?

Livin' Lavish

i'm off purp' so bad i can't hardly breathe
i'm so hungry off that purp' i need to eat
i'm so drunk off henny i can't even see
that my granny love me

-Hemer

From The Beat: This is all we could print of your long flow, because the rest just made us too sad, ya know. Even this part, makes us feel bad for your granny - and for you, too.

The Way We Is

I walk around with a gun on my waist. Don't care fo' any ninja but family. I've been through mo' shhh than a lot.

Well, me and my ninja, Rell, when we want something, we get it. If it means robbin' a ninja or hittin' a lick, we ain't ever been scared. We have no second thoughts. We just react.

This is what we do on a daily basis: smoke weed, hit a lick in early morn', go dumb, and hit the block and get money. Our moms always trippin' 'cause they hate our ways.

But we learn from our mistakes. But I haven't learned yet. Jail ain't nothin', but I did used to be stressin'. Don't get me wrong, I want to get out. But it's not my choice - it's this shady judge.

Where I'm from in Oakland, the block stay' rollin' wit' them knocks. If ya see me on the outs, most likely I got a blunt in my mouth, postin' at the park with some ark and jeck in my hand.

See, I ran from Camp. Now they 'bout to send me to a group home. I'm a pimp that and get it over wit' - that way I don't gotta worry 'bout no sorry DA hatin' on me!

Well, this is me and what I do. If ya got a problem, then forget you! - I love ya Jazmine. I love ya Mom. (In memory of Tim, RIP.)

-Yung Tezz

From The Beat: If you ran from Camp and the judge is giving you a chance at a group placement - how is that shady? But judging from the piece you submit here, it doesn't matter how many chances you get, you'll waste them all - till you're locked down in the pen' remembering how cool it was when you were back in the Hall! And how can you write that you love your mother after writing: "Our moms always trippin' 'cause they hate our ways." Love is more than just words; you show them no love, just pain! It's time for second thoughts. But you're not ready to learn, young man, so you can't be taught! Why wait till it's too late to change your fate? Much love and respect to your mothers.

I Can't ...

I can't get out.
I won't get out.
I got a year today.
I can't see my house.
I can't see my dog.
I can't live my life.
I can't see the faces I want to see.
I can't even see my family when I want.

-Brent

From The Beat: But you don't know yet where you'll spend that year. At the Y? At Camp? At a nearby group home? Or electric monitor or home supervision? Or maybe some combination of these? It's hard to be away from home; but it's not yet set in stone.

I am going to apply the brake to the fast-lane life, 'cause I don't want to be sitting in Santa Rita County Jail when I am twenty-one.

I'm Locked Up

I'm locked up and they won't let me out. I'm sitting here thinking about the outs, thinking to myself that I shouldn't be here. This ain't the place for me. I should be out right now kickin' it with my peeps.

Thinking about my family and my girl sittin' at home worried to death about when I'm getting out and when they gon' see me again when I'm going to see them again. Thinking damn, I messed up. This ain't the place for me. Then I say, I'm locked up man.

-Lil' L

From The Beat: Now that you know jail isn't the place for you, do you plan on going out there and doing whatever it was that got you here? People say a lot when they're incarcerated, but you have to honestly believe that committing crimes isn't for you, as well as surrounding yourself with peers who are doing negative things. So, as Busta Rhymes would say, don't talk about it - be about it.

Stick To The Script

I stick close to the script. Beat workers ask why don't I go deep — because all don't need to know, because they flip it to make sound wrong. They make us out to be monsters. If I truly express myself, maybe I'm a monster that doesn't know how to speak. Or maybe people aren't worthy of my knowledge.

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: So which is it? Are you a monster that doesn't know how to speak or are people not worthy of your knowledge? We know you can speak and that you are not a monster, so maybe you think people are not worthy of your knowledge? Then who is? The Beat is for people to write and share their knowledge with others in hope that your peers will get something positive from it. Don't cop out, Diamond — unless you put it out there, you'll never know what people will make of it.

Making Moves

What's up, Beat. I been thing about a lot of things and how I got here and all I can think about is making the wrong moves, and that ain't cool at all. Because I know how to make the right moves and do what I need to do.

Because if you look at it that's what it's all about making moves, power moving at that. It's just like a chess game — if you make the wrong move game over.

-Lil' Dakota B4

From the Beat: We don't know of too many games of chess that have led to lives lost to the system or to the gun. Go deeper, Lil' Dakota — the right moves are more serious than deciding whether to move your pawn or your rook.

Grow Up

Grow up? For what?

I wanna stay a teen because I love to have fun: Posted up having water fights, on the late night hustle, high, gridin', throwing jokes around, loving my girl an' her friends, hittin' tha studio with my ninja so he could droop some tracks, going to ceramics class an' makin' sculptures of my life.

I take shhh serious, so I only have to elevate my shhh to a higher level.

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: Unfortunately, we all have to grow up sooner or later. Even if we do grow up, it doesn't mean that we can't still have fun. You can be 20, 30, 40, or even (gasp!) 50 and have water fights. However, there does come a point where we've gotta step to the next level. How are you going to elevate? Can you turn some of your interests into pursuits that can sustain you in the adult life?

Accept His Guidance

When my God looks down on me He sees one of His creations. I know He loves me, but what I'm doing is wrong. He sees a sensible human being with the heart of a clown that seems to blow it for Him at the most important moments. And I think he also sees a successful man one day to be if I accept His guidance.

-Sisaro B5

From The Beat: What's stopping you from accepting His guidance right now? Do you think you'll ever be ready to 'succeed' in the eyes of your God? When? We've come across a lot of people who start talking to God when they get incarcerated, but when they get out, it's a totally different story. Are you one of these people?

Good Life Bad Life

You can live a good life by living good and don't be around the wrong people. Keep your mind strong and be around good people, like look for programs — positive programs that will help you through life and help you through college.

Bad life: live a bad life by being around the wrong place, listening to the wrong people, doing they activities, playing people, robbing people, hurting people, selling things. This is what you don't do, and live your life right — have kids, grow old, finish high school, go to college, live right.

-Rell B4

From The Beat: Do you think peer pressure plays a big role in living a good life or a bad one? We feel your distinction between what leads to a good life and what leads to a bad life, but what else can one do when they want to live a good life besides by hanging around with good people and looking for positive programs?

I take shhh serious, so I only have to elevate my shhh to a higher level.

To Her

Not talking doesn't mean we're straying
True love means never betraying
I'll hold ya hand while you watch my back

Trust is hard for most to do but
My love makes it easier for me to you

My mind is telling me to hold you dear
But the whispers in my ear are saying stay clear
But my heart gon' stay no matter what

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: Why do you think the whispers in your ear are telling you to stay clear? Do you think you betrayed your girl by coming to the Hall in the first place, leaving her all alone on the outs? How can you prove that your heart's in it all the way?

Hell On Earth

They say if I keep doing what I'm doing, I'm going to hell. But I feel I'm already in hell living on earth. So I feel if God got a better place then this then I don't mind going, because living in this world ain't safe were we got to watch overhead and be locked up like animals.

I can't lie — I love life — but this world is something else.

-Lil' Dakota B4

From The Beat: We feel you — life on earth does sometimes seem as if nothing could be worse. However, you have the power to make it work for yourself by making your living environment better and making better choices. The way you choose to live is the way your life will be.

live a bad life by being around the wrong place, listening to the wrong people

Free

I wanna get free
I wanna live my life
I wanna go to college
I wanna get a degree
I wanna give off messages
I wanna receive messages
I wanna get a job
I wanna free ma mom of stress
I wanna live in peace
I want the world to be free
And don't want the problems to come to me.

-Young Mizery B4

From The Beat: We want for all of those things to happen to you, and for you, as well. What are you willing to do to gain the freedom you want, to get your degree, to get a job, to free your mom of stress, and live in peace? What sacrifices are you willing to make in the way you've lived your life in order to make these things happen?

Two More Weeks

Today I went to trial and I won, so I was supposed to go with an ankle bracelet 'cause my lawyer asked the judge to release me with an ankle bracelet. And I think he's okay with it, but he said he needs my PO's recommendation and my PO said no. So I'm about to be in here for like two more weeks . . .

That is just straight up play.

-Btg B1

From The Beat: Yeah, that sounds pretty lame. Why do you think your PO wanted you to stay longer? How can you keep your calm over the next two weeks, so that when the time comes you're able to get up and get out?

Big Bruh Ta Lil' Bruh

Bruh, if ya don't wanna get sent off, handle ya business. They gon' send ya off.

Ya catchin' new charges; got ten since ya been down. This SF County is a liberal county — at that they hate to use extreme punishment but they will if you push them, so don't. I love you and be cool.

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: Diamond, if you can give good advice to other people, then what about yourself? How are you going to stop pushing the county to punish you? How can you lead your lil' bruh by example?

Forgiveness

Forgive me for my sins
Forgive me for all the disrespect
Forgive for banging ma block
Forgive me for selling those rocks
Forgive me when I stay up late
Forgive me for smokin' weed/tree
Forgive me for getting locked up
Forgive me for driving stolen cars
Thank you God for my second life
Hey hey

-Young Mizery B4

From The Beat: What will it take to ensure that you don't have to ask for forgiveness again for any of the things you list? What will it take to live with respect, to stop banging, to stay sober, to stay free and make the most of your second life?

Marine World

I like to go to Marine World to ride the rides and to win prizes and to walk around to see the dolphin show and sometimes see the killer whales, to ride the go-carts for fun. And I like to go to Malibu to ride the go-carts and to play games and play golf.

-Maurice B1

From The Beat: That all sounds hella fun, so why are you in here instead of out there? What will it take to make sure you're not locked up away from the summer fun again?

Nine Risk Factors

- Destructive family environments
- Guns
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Attitude / I don't care
- Negative view of women
- Destructive language
- Fearship vs Friendship
- Material values over family

-Diamond Pg B4

From The Beat: How do you deal with these risk factors? Are they all equal in their ability to derail lives? How can you fight them off? Which of these risk factors have you succumbed to?

The Eyes of God

I think every time the Lord would look down on me. He would see a person who wants to make somethin' out of nothin'! He see that I'm not a perfect person and I done some mistakes.

And I know he sees me in the future wit' Dora in a happy home wit' my kids. And even though I done some messed up shhh in the past, I know he still keeps on blessing me.

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: Yeah, God works in mysterious ways, or so we've heard. We envy the strength you have to view things in a positive way. It takes a whole lot of courage to do that when you're down and out. How has he blessed you recently? What was the best blessing you got from your God?

Stand By The Side

Livin' a life that they think is right where they constantly have to battle and fight just to survive

Blocking out their pain, cries at night how fear that there going to outlive their child's life But their pride is why it's easy for their friend to manipulate

that the wrong thing is right

But what don't realize is a friend ain't a friend if you have to prove yourself just to stand by the side.

-Double D B1

From The Beat: We agree — you shouldn't have to prove yourself through worthless, or destructive, acts to be considered a friend. How can you make sure that you live to outlive your parents? What will it take to avoid being manipulated yourself?

People told me

Colorado is a good program, so I'm just gonna have to wait and see.

Shhh! Be Quiet

When people become incarcerated they tend to begin to talk a lot. They feel they have to tell their "war stories" to earn their respect. A lot of the time people don't know who they're talking to. They could be talking to the wrong person and get themselves hurt.

So I feel when people get into a surrounding they are not familiar with, or new to, they should watch and observe before they put their business out there.

-Tru B5

From The Beat: We can't deny that what you said is very real, so we won't. Do you see this happen often? What about the people who tell 'war stories' as if they were true when everybody knows they're lying? Does that happen a lot where you are? Can you explain a situation like that for us?

They feel they have to tell their "war stories" to earn their respect.

Confused Kid

When God looks down on me he sees a young kid confused. Just not caring about anything but himself, kinda being selfish. But at the same time hurting inside because of family.

-Pato B2

From The Beat: Honest, insightful writing, Pato. What are you confused about, and what in your family is causing you pain? Have you found any good ways of dealing with your pain, or are they usually things that hurt you and your family? We hope you can take your time in the Hall to figure out how be clearer about your life.

I Commit Crimes

I commit crimes

But I pray

Before I do

Because I know

What I am about to do

Is wrong

But in my heart

I have to do this

So I pray God forgives me

For what I do

And maybe someday

I can make it into heaven.

-Kutches B4

From The Beat: We're curious why would God forgive you if you know what your about to do is wrong, but you do it anyway? Do you think that maybe God is insulted that you pray right before you do things you know are wrong, instead of using prayer and belief to movie towards the right?

What I Do

Yo, this is Peanut in B2. I used to rob people, still do, but I do it on the under, you know what I'm talking about. Where I like, we always doing something stupid. We be stealing Toyota Camrys and be smashin' through the block. I was raised where we stay hiffy all day.

We ain't in no gang. We don't have to get jumped in, you just got to put in work in for the block. If you don't, then you ain't from there, that's how it is. You got to respect that we sell weed and we do a lot of other things, too, and carry out a lot of thangs, too. If you know what I mean, you feel me? That's it, that's all.

RIP dead homies.

-Lil' E B2

From The Beat: Sounds like you still have it bad, thinking that what you're doing on your block is all good. We wish you'd find other more positive things to do with your time, but if not, we guess we'll be seeing a lot of you in the Halls.

To My Ninja

I remember when we was lil' ninja, just bullshhhin' on the block, me, you, Money, Lil' D, BO, Bear, P-Nut, Lil' Dre, Tone, and Ant, and all the other stars, Smoking more blunts than we really can handle.

I remember that night we drank and smoked so much we all passed out on the front steps and yo' moms came out and tried to whip our ass. And we got up and broke down the block, and you was scared to go back home.

When we was doing lil' shhhh like that it was all fun and games, but a few years beyond that we started selling crack, got into a lil' funk and started packing straps. We hit party deep and put suckas to sleep. We come up big after doing it real big. I get him ,you get him, and we would go from the shoulders. They couldn't mess with us. We was the life of the party.

We sippin' on that Hulk. But when that people took over, we were hurting somebody. But now you gone and we can't do it no more. I love you my ninja. When I'm gon' see you again? RIP Scharod, Chris, Sean, Y-Mee, Mike Penn Reese.

-Robb B2

From The Beat: What a sad piece. Too bad you two couldn't stay doing the little stuff and having fun. We hope Scharod's death has made you want to live longer and more safely. His poor mom must be really sad now.

A Disgrace

This place disgraces me

My parents don't have to pay a fee

This place is near

SOTA HS and I wanna get out of here

This place is gay

The counselors all say hey, fay

-Drone B2

From The Beat: The first two lines of this place say a lot about you, Drone. We hope you won't disgrace yourself anymore, and we hope you'll take you're writing more seriously. You're good at it.

Going Away

Sometimes ask God, why am I going through all this shhh? I'm gonna have to be away from my familia and my loved ones for 10 months. I had a family visit today and my PO told me I should be leaving any day now. But with POs, you never know.

People told me Colorado is a good program, so I'm just gonna have to wait and see.

To my homeboy, do what you gotta do so you won't be in the same place you're in now. Keep your head up. To my man, you know I'm ready to ride with you.

-Alicia GU

From The Beat: Alicia, we're so happy to hear that you're really ready to change your life. It'll be hard to be away from your family, but just think, if you do a good program, you'll be free to spend all the rest of your time with your family. Keep your attitude straight and you're sure to succeed in Colorado, in college, and in the future.

This place disgraces me

Maintaining

I really ain't feeling these topics, so I just want to say Beat, that I've been maintaining in here. Still finding ways to keep myself positive. Doing push-ups, reading books, and educating myself. Waiting to get out of these slave quarters.

Can't complain, I put myself here, now I got to get through it. That's all I got.

-Diddy B5

From The Beat: We'd normally want you to write more, but you said so much with such few words that we ain't even trippin'. The Beat welcomes writings that aren't necessarily on topic because sometimes those are our best pieces. So keep maintaining and hopefully you'll be feeling next week's topics. But until then, keep your head up and remain focused.

It's too much going on to stop, too many things happened.

I would tell you anything though.

Achin'

Struggling to make it off probation

A ninja's faking

Feels like my heart is vacant

Sittin' in this place and

Stressing

'Cause I know what's right

But my heart is telling other

So I'm achin'

-Yogi B2

From The Beat: We know it can be a real struggle to stick to your probation, but we believe you want to do right, so in the long run, probation just might help you live the life you want to live. But that's only if you can keep yourself from violating. We know you can do it.

When God Looks Down On Me

When God looks down on me, I believe that he feels that I'm a good person. I know I'm a good person, and I do what I can to be a good person.

But if he was to come tell me about what he thinks about me, He would say that I need to make better decisions because my bad decisions are what get me in trouble.

-Roderick B2

From The Beat: Another honest piece, Roderick. What do you think causes good people to make bad decisions?

On The Way Home

When I got back from a party and I was on my way home, someone was on the other side of the street walking the other way. They looked at me funny so I turned around to see who he was looking at. I guess he thought I was someone else, so he started running towards me pulling out a gun, so I ran behind a car.

When I came back from around the car he didn't expect me. He dropped his gun and ran. After that I looked to see if anyone saw what happened then I picked up his gun and got on.

-Lil' Bo B2

From The Beat: Ah Thibo, sounds like you're living in a tough area. We know you can do be so much more in life if you put your mind to it. We hope you will before you're in so deep it seems like all your opportunities have disappeared.

Sees Me

When your God looks down, what does he see?

Me and you and this messed up life slanging
Robbing people and giving money and pimping
And that's the real problem is, life, me, my dad, and
gangbanging

Breaking into houses and selling sacks in this dangerous
game

And forget a job, my job is this

By the way, I love God and my mom

And as a child, my life is a dream of illegal activities

My block

But jacking cars, not me

-K'nard B2

From The Beat: It's sad to us that you consider slanging, robbing folks, and pimping your job. We understand what you're saying, but we wish it were different. We hope someday you'll find a job that pays legally and doesn't hurt other people.

Did You Get The Message

Actually I wanted to start off by saying hey. But do your ears be open when the Omega man comes up here every week to give off messages?

That shhh is real son — just listen up when Jack bring lots of different people to speak. Keep yo' ear open an listen 'cause that message will send you to some better places and give good thoughts, other than going back to tha block to get yourself placed back here or maybe dead leaving moms crying and grandma dying of stress, of old age, and yo' problems.

Get out, stay up, and get a job and stop that rob.

-Young Dunn B4

From The Beat: Yep, Jack and his colleagues at Omega come with it day in, day out, and it's up to y'all to make good on the knowledge that they share. What is it about those messages that make them so real? For those readers who aren't lucky enough to have Omega in their units, what's the essence of the message they spit? What are you going to do to live the words of wisdom that Jack and his people deal?

The Reason

The reason why the beef in the street is so hard nowadays is because most young males is raised with one parent and most of the time that one parent is thei' mother or grandmother and they have some female tendency.

-Devonnea B1

From The Beat: We were with you for a minute there — it is hard being raised with one parent, and maybe that's part of the explanation for the beef — but what in the world does having "some female tendency" have to do with beef?

Me And Her

Man, YGC is something, 'cause I been talking to her for a min, but when I was out, we was talking, but not like we do now. But when I was out, I was feeling her, but it was a lot of kid stuff going around.

See, now I am really feelin' her. I see her when I get out we gone have something going on, like maybe we might have some kids or something, but I know we gone be true.

-J-Stub B2

From The Beat: We hope this relationship will work out, J-Stub. Do you think this girl will help you slow down on the streets, or is she into the thug side of you?

Bad Examples

I think the real problem is bad examples. Everyone knows right from wrong, but bad examples take a toll on people and make them do wrong, break the law.

That's why I'm in here — bad examples. I know right from wrong, that's why I'm not going to point the finger or blame anyone for my crime.

-Mac B4

From The Beat: You said you know right from wrong, so even when you see a bad example and you know that's wrong, why do you tend to follow those examples? Where can you look for good examples?

Soak It Up

The real problem that I, Cedro, have is I need to soak the positive game up instead of just listening and letting it come out of one ear and go out the other. Because that is why I always end up in here, YGC. That is what I am working on in here right now so I can stay out of any institution. Chea uh boom.

-Cedro B4

From The Beat: What is the positive game that's being spit, the positive game that you know you should be soaking up? Share with us. If you were to put yourself in the position of the teacher dropping positive game, what advice would you have to share?

That's why I'm in here — bad examples.

No Love

I ain't got no love for the other — no sympathy, no remorse. Too many things have happened to make peace. The only way that things are going to be coo' is if all of them is gon' or I have something better to do. But I don't want to leave this city. This is where I grew up. I love everything about it — the murder, the beef, family so close to my house. I love it all.

It's going to be awhile before it stops with me. It's too much going on to stop, too many things happened. I would tell you anything though.

-Leek B5

From The Beat: We kind of figured you would tell us anything, but still what you're saying is really painful to hear. Usually people love this city because of all its attractions. Things like The Golden Gate Bridge, Coit Tower, Lombard Street, and Golden Gate Park. But you like it because of the murder and beef. That says a whole lot about who you are, and we're hoping you won't be that way forever.

I Wish

The one person that I wish I could talk to is my little brother. I would apologize to him for all the things I done to him. I'd tell him how much I love and miss him. He is at 214 Walden House for boys now and I am going to see him soon. I want him to know that I love him and that I am proud of him. I also want to tell him to keep his head up in there. I know it's hard in the beginning but things are going to get better.

I know what you are going through, I'm going through the same thing right now and I want to keep my mind focused on the future because in the future I want both of us out on our feet. I want you to be out there doing good and living right. Not how we used to be with mama. Just Think of our freedom as our most important thing and some day we will earn that back. But now we just got to do what we have to do to get right and get our freedom back. I love you baby bro.

-Maria

From The Beat: We think that if there is anything that needs to be said you say it best with this piece. We feel honored to have witnessed your transformation during the time you have been at Walden House PSK and participating in The Beat workshops. We really hope that your lil brother takes this advice for as much as it is worth, it could buy him his freedom. Stay focused Maria and you know the dream you share with us here will one day so be a reality.

I Wish I Never Saw...

I wish I never saw prostitution. It took a big part of my life. I didn't realize the harm I was causing myself and my family. I saw a lot of bad things. I now know that I have more self worth. The first time was so scary. How could people buy me? It is crazy.

-Erica

From The Beat: Yeah it is crazy Erica. No one deserves to go through what you have, especially at such a young age. Now that you are in programming have you felt like you are achieving some closure on that part of your life? We think that you have a bright future ahead of you still and hope that you don't let the past weigh you down too much.

I Wish...

I wish I could talk to young girls to let them know they are worth so much more. Life is an amazing gift. Take what you can.

The money that you make won't buy you happiness.

If that is what makes him "love you," it ain't real. If he is willing to risk your life for material things you think of how much you mean to him.

Do you feel like you get enough for what you do?

The answer is no, you will never get enough.

That life gets to short roads.

Think about yourself next time you hit a blade or get a date.

-Erica

From The Beat: Just in time. Maybe this opportunity to send out the message you wanted to all the young girls out there is your wish coming true, after all there will be countless young women who will read this piece. How did you come across this advice yourself? Keep on keep'n on Erica, we dig your example of each one teaching one.

I should learn how to say "no!" instead of getting caught

That Person

A person I wish I could talk to today

Is somewhere many miles away

I wish that I could see him

And hold him tight

And feel him close

In the middle of the night

As I sit alone on my bed

Thoughts of the past come into my head

I was afraid and had to run

But now I regret what I had done

I know that I treated you like dirt

Now I realize it's US I hurt.

-Ashley

From The Beat: With time you know that you won't be lonely long. But what is it about this person that makes them someone that you want to be with so much that you are not focused on much more?

I want him to be coo and stay away from drugs, jail, and all negative

Wasted Time

I wish I had spent more time paying attention to what I wanted to do. I never really did anything I cared about. I'm bored constantly. If I put my mind to it, I can master anything. But I just don't care. Didn't care.

Now I refuse my laziness. I'm going to stick to it. I will follow through. I know how to learn. I just am too ambivalent to do it. Well, screw that! Bwahaha . . . yeah. Ok, I'm done.

-Drusilla

From The Beat: It ain't too late to do what you want to do. You are so young and have so much life ahead of you that with a lil planning and determination you can still achieve all that you want to in life..

That Person

The person I would love to talk to would be my mom.

I wish I didn't waste my time by doing meth and drinking wine.

I wish I can turn back time and stop what I was doing and spend some time with my mom and learn how to speak my mind.

I should learn how to say "no!" instead of getting caught up in temptation and drama I could have avoided.

-Celeste

From The Beat: Would it be possible to send your mom this piece? Maybe you can't talk with her in person but there is always the power of the pen and pencil. What will it take for you to learn what you want and just say "no?" We think that by the time you get out of Walden House you will have received all the support and power you need to do whatever you want in life.

I Wish I Never Saw...

I wish I never saw Juvenile Hall. At first I used to be spooked of going in there. Now that I have been there a couple of times it's like it's nothin. I ain't scared of going back the only thing is that I am going to have to serve time. While you are in there time be going by.

I also wish I never met my man, cause now I miss him hella much and wish I was on the outs with him. I just wish I could spend quality time ...

-Suga Free

From The Beat: Remember what we talked about in the workshop Suga Free. The system is set up so as to make you "institutionalized." In other words don't you think that the easier it is for you to handle some time then the easier it is for the system to make money off you? Don't let wearing someone elses underwear and being told what to do and when to do it every day, as the reality of incarceration entails, become something that is worth accepting.

If I Could...

If I could write someone it would be my patna in the hall. He been in there for a coo amount of time. His name is Juan. I just want to tell him to keep his head up, don't get caught up doing what you used to do. I want him to succeed in life, to have a nice car, a house, and just be stunnin on everyone out there. I want him to be coo and stay away from drugs, jail, and all negative shhh. I know he can do it, so when I him stunnin we can ride back like what it do. Keep yo head up, see ya round.

Shout out to Alameda Juvenile Hall. Hey Ms. Wadud, Ms. Henry, Ms. Theuz, Ms. McDowell, Mr. Irving.

-Suga Free

From The Beat: This is what we like to hear from our workshop veterans; taking up the right words of encouragement and sending them out to your peers as messages of unity. We hope that the young homey in the hall takes your advice and gets ittogether so you can all be out here in the freeworld stunnin in a positive way.

Wasted Time...

Wasted time inside these walls I cry myself to sleep and wonder when they'll crumble and fall.

I see the outside from my room's window and wonder what the outside is like.

All I see is four little walls closing in on me then I think about release and that someday I would be free.

-Sarah

From The Beat: What a great departure from the Sarah who first began writing in The Beat Within! We are really feeling this new flow. What has made you feel different about writing? Could you share that experience with us?

The money that you make won't buy you happiness.

My Homie

Verse One:

I've been sitting here, all lonely,
Tryna find out why they took my homie
He was my right-hand
He was my ace man
I never thought I'd see him
Ridin' in that black van
I spill the liquor on his grave
I'm a carry on his name
From the dust that we came
To the dust we return to
They done took one damn life
And I know they coming back to take mine
So, instead of tryin' to run an' hide
I might just meet 'em at the state line
'Cause ninjas now don't play no games
'Cause they aiming choppas at yo' brain

Chorus:

I just wish my homie was here right now
'Cause I'm making money off in the 'hood
He was always by my damn side
Every time I took a ride
(Repeat 2x)

Verse Two:

Every time I took a ride
He was always by my damn side
I'm a keep it real for him
'Til I see the promised land
Hope I go to heaven, man
'Cause hell just ain't my plan
My tears fall like rain
Can anybody feel my pain?
'Cause tha block just ain't the same
Wit' out you living, man

Chorus:

Verse Three:

He was down for whatever, man
Bustin' heads an' makin' chedda, man
Rest in peace, my ninja, rest in peace
Rest in peace, my ninja, rest in peace
Rest in peace, my ninja, rest in peace
Rest in peace, my ninja
While I ride an' die for you
I'm a see you soon
So make some damn room
Here I come
Here, I told y'all ninjas
I wasn't no hoe
When I ride
It's for the best
My nerves, ninja
Please don't test
'Cause if you do
You bound to get laid to rest
Send me a sign
Let me know
You waiting on me
Down here on earth
Ninjas hating on me
You see
No fear in my eyes
'Cause it ain't none
Even though they walking,
Tooting big buns
They wanna take me out the game
'Cause I been won

Chorus:

-Smurf

From The Beat: If the people who took your friends life are threatening to take your life, we hope that you do something about it. Hint: call the police. What have you learned from his death? Would you be ashamed to get out of the game, or do you feel honor-bound to stay in it, now that your homie is dead? What do you think your homie would want for you now?

Forget Haters

The real problem is that haters that's walking around and the shhh people hate on is stupid — my dubs bigger than yours, so they hate. Forget them.

-Smurf

From The Beat: That is hella petty. Will this ever stop? What do you think it will take for people to see past material things??

It All Started By Gangs

It all started by gangs. Right now I'm in a gang. I got jumped in a long time ago. When I got jumped in a few people were against me, but I don't have to fight back and it's only for a few seconds, that's about it.

And now I'm still the same person. I'm in it and I got everybody's respect; everything goes cool. I am not in jail because of gangs; I'm in for other things, like stealing.

-Marcelo

From The Beat: Do you have anybody's respect for anything not related to your being in a gang? If so, what? Do you respect yourself? If so, what for? What would not being in a gang do to your daily life? Could you get yourself jumped out of the gang, if you wanted to? What would it take? Could you leave the gang and make it on your own?

My Chihuahua

The thing I miss the most in lock up is my doggy, Mary Jane. She is a Chihuahua. She is my daughter. But the second time I came in here, my mom (wicked witch of the West) gave my puppy, Mary Jane, an operation for no babies in the future.

So from inside Juvy, I gave Mary Jane to my friend who I can trust. So it's been a long time and she is still as happy. I still visit her a lot and she sleeps over a lot. I like her a lot, and if anyone ever hurt her, hey, I'll go crazy on them.

-Mary Jane Jr.

From The Beat: Even though your home is your mom's and her decisions must take precedence, it would have been nice of her to explain to you why she thought your doggie would be better off spade, Mary Jane. It's so hard, when you can't protect your pet. Do you think your doggie is happy with your friend? At least your mom lets your doggie stay over with you sometimes!

This Guy

It started a few years back, when I was into drugs and met dis guy who slanged to me. I liked him since then... his long hair and the sexy complexion of his face. Then one night things went down, and from that moment I wanted him to be mine.

I don't know if it was my mind or it was the drugs that we were using together. All I know is after years of messing with him, I finally got him to truly, deeply love me... and we've been going our for eight months...eight months of bad and horrible, sad moments. Also good times.

-Lil' Mami

From The Beat: What is your life like without this guy, Lil' Mami? We know it's easy as a teenager to get sprung on a guy, but have you made sure your life is solid and productive on its own? If this guy were to disappear tomorrow, would you be okay? Are you going to school? Working? Helping your family? If this guy is giving you eight months of horrible, sad and bad moments, is he really worth it?

Being Raised In The Neighborhood

I think I started gangbanging by being raised in the neighborhood, smoking drugs and slanging drugs. I learned from my friends I hung out with, stealing all kinds of stoles (stolen cars) like nothing.

Hopefully, when I get out, I won't go back to the things I was doing — making keys, stealing G rides. Well, that's all I got to say. I'm out. Peace.

-Lil' L

From The Beat: You may be right, being raised in your neighborhood may have started you in your game. It's natural to think that whatever is going on around you is normal. But now you know that using drugs can severely hurt people, and getting caught using or selling them can wound you. What else that's exciting, glamorous even, that's legal, is going on in your life? Can you build your life around it and stay out of trouble?

It All Started With Drugs

It all started when I started using drugs. Ever since I started doin' drugs, I've stolen cars, sold drugs, come to Juvenile Hall, lost my girlfriend, and generally messed up my life. But all that shhh is behind me now, so it's all good.

-Up

From The Beat: How did you decide to put all that mess behind you? Are you going back to school in the fall? How is your family managing with you in trouble? How will you replace the life you must leave behind, in order to stay out of trouble and out of Juvy? (Sorry we had to change your name.)

The Rule

Well, nothing is my real problem, because all I ever do is smoke weed and after that, I really don't remember any of that, so you know what the rule says, "If you can't remember it, it never happened."

-Jonathan

From The Beat: Do you think maybe your problem is you can't stand knowing what you think you can't remember, and use weed as an excuse? And that your next problem concerns smoking weed to solve your problems? When you're all alone in your room in Juvy, where you have no access to drugs, do you remember what really went down? Then how do you deal with it?

We're All God's Children

I believe that we are all God's children. In saying this, all that we do, our choices, we make, God watches us. Though some of us love to live "the street life," all our sins we make, God will decide when we will get punished.

I think, though, I get mad when I get caught. I think it's probably for the better, 'cause I feel that I should change my way of life. Even God knows it by hinting at it (being sent to Juvy.)

-Colombia

From The Beat: If you think God is trying to guide you into a better life by your getting busted and sent to Juvy, what do you think God wants you to learn? What do you think God hopes you'll do when you get out? Is it what you want for yourself? How will you change your life and direct it the way it should go?

Bein' Tested

It all started off as a youngsta, bein' tested by the older cousins. "Go do that for me, cousin, steal that, bring some work over, go steal on that square-ass ninja, get his money, too. Throw ya set up, lil' cousin. Bet a dub you won't get dat purse." Sorta like that you, you feel me?

In Marin, it's all about ya chedda, that scratch, hustlin', buttered down. Goin' dumb in yo' white-t, posted on the block, set up shop.

-ET

From The Beat: You told us what it is like where you live, but you sound like you know in your heart this game is dead-end for you. If you wanted to get out of the game, what would it take? Have you ever considered it? How would you get out and what else, that's legal, could you do to earn money?

What To Do?

I sit in my cell, thinking what to do.
I stare at my wall, thinkin' what to do
I pick up a book and begin to read, but for a few seconds

Put my book down, trying to think
As I get madder and madder
I wish I was dead
'Til I get out
I'll wish I'm dead

-Tyler

From The Beat: When you ask yourself, what should you do, what are you referring to? How should you manage your life when you get out of Juvy? At whom or what are you angry? Since you're stuck in Juvy right now, why don't you just try and learn from it? Can you draw, write, read, think about what got you into Juvy and how you won't make that mistake again?

Can you all even imagine having to spend a year asking for permission to do everything?

Estar En Una Pandilla

Quando estas en una pandilla, tienes que peliar, para defender a tu barrio de esos vatos que no quieren a los Mexicanos y que son racistas. También cuando estas en la pandillas tienes que robar o si no, no tienes jale.

From The Beat: Chocho, y así estas metido en una. Tienes que buscar la manera como salirte de esa pandilla, porque si sólo te va a causar problemas y a los demás, tienes que salirte de ella.

Being In A Gang

When you're in a gang, you have to fight, to defend your 'hood from those fools who do no like Mexicans, and whom are also racist. Also, when you're in a gang, you have to steal because if you don't, there's no money to flip.

-Conejo, Marin

Yo He Cambiado Mucho

Yo he cambiado mucho porque he pensado mucho en lo que hice y me arrepiento de lo que hice. Por eso quiero cambiar mi forma de ser y no cometer más delitos.

From The Beat: ¿En que has pensado? Sólo eso esperamos que estes hablando en serio, porque la verdad es que hablar por hablar no vale, es actuar y realizar lo que manda.

I Have Changed A Lot

I have changed a lot because I've been pondering on what I have done and I regret what I have done. That's why I want to change who I am and commit no more mistakes.

-Victor, 150-Crew

Ustedes No Nacieron Malo

Hmmmm, la gente y los bebes mejor dicho nacen bien sanos y buenos, pero con el tiempo llegan a cambiar por el tratamiento durante su crecimiento. A veces es culpa de sus padres porque los padres siempre aconsejan a sus hijos, pero ellos no obedecen a sus hijos y por eso terminan haciendo lo que sus amigos les dicen. Como yo por ejemplo: Yo vengo de una buena familia. A mí siempre me enseñaron a respetar y a no meterme en problemas, pero, por falta de desobediencia, por eso estoy aqui.

Para los que estan aqui, no se crean malos porque todos nacen bueno y para todos aquellos que piensan que son malos, no son malos. Si te crees malo porque no te enfrentas para ver si en verdad eres malo.

From The Beat: Si, tienes razón, los padres también deberían de escuchar si tanto les gusta ser escuchado. Todo tiene que ser parejo, porque nosotros los jovenes tenemos que ser escuchado porque si no nos escuchan siempre necesitamos a alguien quien nos escuchen y es ahí donde terminamos haciendo amistades malas. Esperamos que tú también no creas que eres malo porque tú sabes a donde van a parar los malos, en la tierra, en el hospital o en algún lugar peor que donde estas.

You Were Not Born Bad

Hmmm, people, better say babies, are born healthy and good, but in time, they change due to the way they are brought up. Sometimes it's their parents' fault because parents always advise their kids, but they don't listen to what their kids have to say, therefore, their kids end up doing what their friends tell them to do. Like me for example: I come from a good family. I was always taught to respect others and to not get myself involved in trouble, but because I didn't always listen, that's why I am here right now.

For the people that are in here, don't think that you're bad because we're all born good, and for those who think they're bad, they're not. If you think that you're bad, why don't you come see me and we'll see if you really are bad?

-Lil' Droopy, B4, SF/YGC

Busquen Quien Los Escuche

Lo que le puedo decir a alguien quien quiere consejos es que si no tiene a alguien quien escuche lo que tiene que decir, que consigan a alguien con quien puedan confiar aunque sea a su mamá, su papá, su un hermano/a, o si tiene amigos, que se consiga uno de ellos con quien confiar. No importa si es un amigo o amiga.

También pueden platicar con Dios. Sabes que Dios si te escucha y sabes que Dios te puede entender todo lo que le digas. El te entiende y también te puede perdonar.

From The Beat: Es verdad lo que dice su amigo, la neta es que es bueno buscarse a alguien con quien destresarse, pero no buscar aquel que te va a dar malos consejos. Dios siempre estará ahí por si no encuentran a nadie, pero tienen que saber que Dios primero, en todo momento. El nos dio la vida, el derecho a venir a este mundo. Estamos aquí por alguna razón, recuerden esto.

Look For Someone Who Would Listen To You

What I can tell someone who wants advice is, if they don't have someone to listen to what they have to say, find someone whom they can confide in be it their mother, father, their brother/sister, or if they have any friends, find amongst them, someone whom they can confide in. It doesn't matter if that person is a male or female.

Also, they can always talk to God. You know what? God really does listen to people. You know what else? He'll understand whatever it is that you tell him. He'll understand and He can also forgive you.

Voy A Tratar De Portarme Bien

Que vole, aqui estoy haciendo mi tiempo esperando que me saquen de este daycare lleno de mocosos. Cuando salga de este lugar voy a tratar de portarme bien porque no quiero regresar aqui.

Es difícil para mí cambiar porque vivo en el barrio y me junto con muchas personas que hacen drogas y toman. Eso no está bien para mí, pero a ver que pasa cuando salga.

From The Beat: Si uno quiere cambiar de corazón uno lo puede hacer. Quiero que sepas esto, siempre acuerdalo, el cambio está en tus manos, tú puedes ser diferente y adaptarte a ser diferente el día que ti te sientas seguro de cambiar. Sabemos que es muy difícil aveces cambiar o alejarse de algo cuando estamos muy cerca del objeto, pero siempre se puede. Siempre hay solución, nunca es tarde para empezar.

I'm Going to Try To Behave Well

What's up? As for me, I'm in here just doing my time, waiting to be released from this daycare full of dummies. When I get out of this place, I'm going to try to behave myself because I do not what to come back in here.

It's hard for me to change because I live in the 'hood and I surround myself with too many people that do drugs and drink. That's not good for me, but let's wait and see what happens when I get out.

-Lokote, Marin

Como Me Siento

Hey, simón, la neta ya me quiero ir a mi cantona. Ya estoy hasta la madre de estar aqui. Ya tengo casi un año torcido. Imagínensen un año de estar pidiendo permiso para todo. Lo más culero que me cae es que tengo que pedir permiso para ir al baño. Chale, la neta, preferio estar en la pinta, porque hallá todo es diferente. Ahí no tienes que pedir permiso para ir al baño.

From The Beat: Esperamos que de verdad estes hasta la madre de estar aqui para que no vuelvas a meterte en cosas de estas. Tú eres muy inteligente y este lugar no te pertenece. Te mereces algo mejor, cuida tu vida y los dones que te ha dado. Mirate, estas entero, tiene una vida por delante. Quiero que sepas que estamos orgulloso de ti, porque vemos un nuevo muchacho en ti.

How I Feel

Hey, right, the truth is I want to go to my home. I'm close to being fed up with this place. I've been locked up for almost a year.

Can you all even imagine having to spend a year asking for permission to do everything? Well, that's what I've had to do. What really pisses me off is, I have to ask for permission to use the bathroom.

Damn, to be real, I'd rather be in the pen because everything is different over there. There, you don't have to ask for permission to use the bathroom.

-Juan, Marin

Mis Lágrimas

Yo me acuerdo cuando era chica

Mi papá me decía

"No llores mija"

Y con eso las lágrimas

De mi dolor paraban

Tan facil,

Pero con los días

Cambian las cosas

Mis lágrimas no se quieren ir

Se quedan para hacerme sufrir

Dime Dios que puedo hacer

Para ser como tú quieres.

From The Beat: Que bien que hayas tenido el amor de tu padre. Es bonito tener a alguien quien esté siempre ahí escuchandolo y apoyandolo a uno. Esperamos que siempre tengas a tu papa para que te consuele y te proteja siempre.

My Tears

I remember when I was little

My father would tell me

"Don't cry girl,"

and it would help

stop the tears of pain

very easily,

But with time,

things change

My tears want to continue streaming

They come back to make me suffer.

Tell me God, "What can I do

to be like you?"

-Sad Eyes, Marin

Gracias Mijo

Gracias mijo

Por enseñarme tu amor

Por no causarme dolor

No te olvides de mí

Que nunca me olvidare de ti

Te quiero y te agradezco

Con amor.

From The Beat: Que bien tener un amor que no te cause dolor. Es lo mejor que puede habe en una vida. Cuida a tu hijo.

Thank You Son

Thanks son

For showing me your love

For not causing me any pain

You didn't forget about me

I love you and I appreciate everything

That you do for me with much love.

-Sad Eyes, Marin

From The Beat: In this issue, we're presenting the entries we received for our tenth editorial note contest. For this contest, we asked about your all-time favorite movie. Do you like love stories, horror, crime-and-punishment, or musicals? What was it about that movie you loved so much? Was it actually the movie, or the story that led up to or evolved around the movie?

As always, winning the contest brings more than just props in the pages of The Beat — in honor of the recently completed Olympics in Greece, we're gonna give out gold, silver and bronze medals along with a crown made of olive leaves. Just kidding — the first place winner will receive a money order of \$100; second will get \$50, and two honorable mention winners will get \$25 apiece. Check The Beat in the coming weeks for the winner. So here you are, the entries for The Beat's tenth editorial contest: What's your favorite movie and why?

Michael Fernandez

California Correctional Institution - Tehachapi

The Ten Commandments

(Directed By Cecil B. DeMille)

My all-time favorite movie is the four-hour epic movie "The Ten Commandments." It was back in 1976 when I saw the movie, and the only reason why I remember the year was because a homeboy of mine got stabbed that night. It was a night that my mother didn't let me go out with my friends because she wanted me to stay and watch my lil' sister while she was painting the kitchen. I was furious about her not letting me go out that night, but the homeboy who got stabbed that night by a rival gang was the homeboy that came by on his bike to go out. 'Til this day, I will never forget that: My mother made me stay in, and if I would have went out that night, then maybe I would have gotten stabbed, too.

Well, as I was sitting on the couch with my lil' sister, my mom told me that there's gonna be a good movie called "The Ten Commandments." At the time, I was 15 years old and didn't care about any "Ten Commandment" movie, but being forced to stay home with my lil' sister I sat there with my arms crossed, mad. Well, my mom came over and gave my sister and some ice cream and the movie came on, and I was not so mad anymore.

Well, before I go on, I want you to know after I seen that movie, well, throughout the years, I must have seen it five more times. The movie was made in 1956 and to just picture back then of all the good special effects back then was amazing! The movie deals with a man known as Moses, played by Charlton Heston — a great actor! It deals with a great story in The Bible, a story probably your mom or grandmother has told you, but I never really knowing about this man called Moses. This particular movie makes a person laugh, cry, angry, happy, all in one!

There are not too many movies — good movies — that come from The Bible. I'm not a religious man, but I believe in what my mother has raised me to believe, and that's Dios (God!). And every person in this world at one point or another thinks about that man up above. Even the ones that say they don't believe bring up his name when they're in dying need. When someone gets shot and they're lying there, what do they say? "Oh God help me," right!

Well, this movie "The Ten Commandments" is about God and a man named Moses. Yes, a baby in a basket going down a small river when a woman sees the basket with a baby in it. Well, she gives it to the King of Egypt's daughter. The boy grows up to become a prince of Egypt — as a Roman, to be exact — but he comes to find out that he's a Hebrew! You see, back then, the Romans had Hebrew slaves, so Moses that was once gonna be the King of Egypt, became a Hebrew slave. Nefretiri, the King of Egypt's daughter, was in love with Moses and tried to hide his nationality so that he would be King of Egypt, but Moses chose to be a slave and help the Hebrew slaves. But Rameses, the King's son, threw Moses out of Egypt and into the hot desert and told him to never return.

You see, Moses knew that he was something special! But, he couldn't figure it out until one day God spoke to him, and said go back and set the Hebrew people free. Now Moses, after kneeling down in front of a burning bush on

'Til this day, I will never forget that: My mother made me stay in, and if I would have went out that night, then maybe I would have gotten stabbed, too.

a high mountain, became a different man. He walked back down and he was now on a mission to go back to Egypt and free the slaves.

The movie is so real! And look at all the extras in that movie and think about the good cast members!

Yul Brenner played Rameses, and the way he spoke — wow! The words meant a lot back then. And Edward G. Robinson, who played Dathan, the conniving, hustlin' snake! So many good actors that Cecil B. DeMille wanted because this four hour movie was an award-winning Oscar! Actors like those guys played the parts with all their heart! And look at all the man-hours to set up a big movie like that. This movie comes from the "most popular book in the world" — The Holy Bible. To see events on the big screen is amazing! Like when Moses parted the sea, or when he threw down his walking stick and it turned into a snake, or when Moses turned the water that Rameses was drinking into blood — wow! Now, I'm talking back in the days, 1956 when this movie was made! Good special effects for that era, but if you really think about it, that movie was sad, too! Like the time when the old man, a Hebrew slave, was in the mud and straw pit and a Roman soldier threw his bone-crushing dagger in his gut. Wow! But, back in the days, this is what really went on. Men were men back then.

And what about the part when, and I'm sure that whoever saw the movie was so happy, when Moses was in the temple with the King and Rameses. Then, a Hebrew slave ran to get Moses because of an old woman was trapped under a huge cement roller and was gonna get squashed. Well, Moses got on his horse, got down from his horse, and told the people to stop the rollers! And hundreds of slaves dropped the ropes. Moses got off his horse, took out his dagger, kneeled down, and the old woman grabbed his arms, crying, and Moses cut her free from the roller. And trip! The old woman was his own biological mother. Wow! Now that got to me. You see, the man had (but Moses didn't know!) passion and Rameses was furious that Moses stopped the big rollers just to free an old woman. Then, Moses also said to the slaves, "One day, rest and eat!" Then, Rameses said, "You save an old woman, give the slaves a day to rest and food!" Rameses was furious, but Moses says, "When your horses are hungry, you feed them, and when they're tired, they rest, and when they thirst for water, they drink."

The movie was well written, and then I think about the Ten Commandments in the Bible! Thou shall not steal, thou shall not lie, etc. It's a trip! Even someone wrote a song called "The Ten Commandments of Love." I was in love with the king's daughter, Nefretiri. Wow! Now, that's natural beauty! That movie had me stuck on the TV set. I swear! And the words they spoke were real meaningful words! "So let it be written, so let it be done." You know what I'm saying?

When it comes to history, it's nice to see a nice, good movie about that certain time. Charlton Heston will always be known as Moses. It's just the way it is. Well, that's my all-time favorite movie. To all the kids out there, if you read my all-time favorite movie in The Beat Within, well, see the movie, and you too will be in awe.



Steven Bernal
Pelican Bay State Prison

The Mummy Returns (The Monster Returns)

After many months waiting in a Juvy camp, early May always seemed a month away. Yet that day in May I finally left the teenage rigors of PT and the monotony of daily marches was stepping onto the shores of an unscarred island after swimming in the turbulent throws of a violent ocean.

A warm breeze gently caressed the California barrio I call home, with it entailing the traditional summer scents — the tangy smells of BBQ linger invitingly, permeating the twilight's glow. I silently watch golden fingers stretch aching and slipped into another end of a majestic sunset.

There she stood — almond brown eyes, exotic like pools of amber, enticing you to loose yourself in their gaze. The silken cream of her skin, a stark contrast to the dangerously jet black curls of her middle-length hair, she welcomed me out with a smile.

"Babe, this movie just opened. I waited for you to come out so we can see it together," she said in a mock accusing tone, followed by a smile. "I already bought us tickets for 8:00, so andale. Pues, get ready," she added, daring protest.

Thrilled by the prospect of a night in the town with my girl after months apart, I offered none. I rushed to the shower, asking my homeboy if he can iron some Levis.

"Only if I can go with you, and you know I'm listo." Without pause or doubt, I easily consented. Into the city night we strolled, with its streets alive and moving like the inner working of an ant colony ever set in motion.

Feeling like a million bucks with my girl on my right and my homie on my left, noticing for the first time the subtleties of life that always seemed too vague, now screaming so vividly and intense for its presence to be

appreciated, that I missed its step at its revelation.

"You OK?" they echoed in unison.

"I'm straight. Just wanted to see if you'd catch me if I slipped," I retorted coolly.

Grasping the hidden innuendo, she shot back, "Don't slip too far or too much." Always a mediator.

"We're here," my homeboy interrupted.

It had been years since I stepped into a theater. Not since pre-adolescence. When your life is in a constant spin, you hardly find the time. Yet there I was — eighteen, stumbling into the pitch-blackness of mainstream opera, the distant relative to the tragic plays of yore. What critique would Shakespeare offer to the silver screen? All I know is, there I sat with my girl, a row ahead of my friend, to see "The Mummy Returns," trading kisses in the dark like secret lovers, during scenes that seemed to stretch their existence. And in the dim aurora of the screen, like shadows dancing to the backdrop of a beaming moon and sparkling stars, I saw a smile so bright, so warm, it redeemed the coldest winter and harshest storm. Flicking M & Ms at each other, 'cause that's what teens do, we bantered back and forth at the movie's end on the best parts, the worst, rehashing scenes missed in romantic interludes, and pledged to do it again soon.

"The Mummy Returns" is a good movie, but it's my favorite 'cause it's more than a movie. It's the myriad of feelings invoked in one scene from one time. In the museum creator and her husband's characters, I see the essence of first love. In her brother and husband, a homie's cariñoso. In the movie in general, I see the memory of a perfect night often fantasized, the sentimental goodbyes to the last remnants of innocence and invincibilities of adolescence, to the brutal hellos of adulthood.

One month later, me and my homie were in the county, on our way to the Pen. For the decades of storm to come, it is my last ray of sunshine. My favorite movie.

K-Oz

Pelican Bay State Prison

What critique would Shakespeare offer to the silver screen?

The Sandlot

Growing up in the Bay Area, I have always loved the game of baseball. And living in the 'hood meant we either ghetto-rigged a diamond field or walked hella far to the nearest park. I was never one for walking (laziness), so we made a playing field out of this undeveloped dirt lot on my block.

Home plate was a piece of cardboard. First base was some plywood. Second base was a rusty radiator and third base was a garbage can. Add a ball, a few old mitts, and a bat as well as a few young homies and we were in business.

That was a time when I didn't have a care in the world except baseball. This was before the gangs and the drugs or backstabbing homies. The only worry I had at the time was whether we had enough money for a ball if we lost the one we were using, or else try to figure out how we're going to get our ball off old man Dan's roof (he has dogs in his yard).

Fast forward to 1994, Hillcrest Juvenile Hall . . .

I remember a cool CO (they are correctional officers, not counselors) brought a movie for us to watch. It was called "The Sandlot." After seeing it I could relate to most of it, so it became one of my all time favorites.

At the time I was on my way to CYA, so when I was feeling down I'd think of certain parts of the movie. Like when Benny, Squints, Smalls and friends go to the public swimming pool, and Squints keeps idolizing a certain lifeguard (she was very pretty). Well, Squints

gets desperate and jumps in the deep end of the pool and goes down deep. So the lifeguard (the pretty one) jumps in to save the drowning boy. Well, lo and behold, he ain't drowning. It was all a ploy to get her to give him mouth-to-mouth CPR. Once her lips are on his, he starts to kiss her. Squints and his boys get kicked out of the pool for life, but from that day forward he can puff up his chest and say he did the damn thing.

I always admired Squints courage that day, for I used to go swimming at Hoover Park and had a major crush on a certain lifeguard. I always claimed I would do what Squints did, but never found the courage. I tip my hat to you, wherever you are.

I also tried all the tricks of the trade to retrieve our lost balls, everything from sticks to throwing over food to the "killer" dogs. Sometimes we got them back, but most of the time we failed — and just like in the movie, old man Dan told us if we had just rung the buzzer, he would have gotten our balls back, but we were too scared to ask for our balls for we had heard old man Dan killed little kids and fed them to his dogs (turns out the dogs didn't eat kits).

So this movie actually brought back a lot of memories. It took me back to a time where baseball was all that mattered — no cops or dope fiends to look out for. The only worry I had was how to get my ball back once it went over the fence.



Thug Angel

My favorite movie to this day is Tupac's "Thug Angel." That was based on his life, and his struggle not only with life but with the demons that were inside of him. The movie was real down to earth and it took me more than one time to watch it to understand it, 'cause he let you know so much about his life and the things that took place.

It shows the internal struggle of Tupac. It shows that even though he was only 25 years old when he was murdered, that he left a legacy that without a doubt will live on for a lifetime. It also shows how one comes from nothing — from not one dollar in his pocket, no sheets for his bed to sleep on, no food to eat, from nothing — to Gucci sweaters and Benz's and Crystal to all the fina things and doesn't leave any of his friends behind.

With interviews and books and everything that can possibly show you he loved the streets and kept the street kids close to heart, while sending out a message with songs like "Keep Ya Head Up" and "Life Goes On." It partially shows you the effect and the turbulence of a street ninja that has been through a lot and seen a lot and showed a lot of development.

To me and to some people of the streets and throughout the movie, it shows you examples. It's like he was put on earth to make a difference with a short period of time to do it. The messages through the movie and his music, how to act, how to come from nothing, and make it to be something — the movie is something that all can relate to. Just like Jesus was put here to deliver God's word through him, Tupac delivered God's voice and message through his music and it made you get warm inside and think twice, like the same shhh I'm about to go do he's talking about through his music and letting me know what's up.

It tells you through the movie that he was given a short period of time to say and do what he had to and get his voice and message across — not only for him but for us. Like he said in his own words, "I do what I do for the kids in the ghetto that don't got nothing to believe in, nothing to live for, for the kids that really live a thug life where it's like it ain't no going on." That touched me because I felt where he was coming from. I could really relate to what he was talking about. It was like damn, that ninja just said something that made my heart drop 'cause I've been through the same shhh he sayin'.

They said his music was self-destructive but it was self-empowering to us in the streets that got to rob to eat, sell dope to buy clothes. It tells you it's more to life than the streets. It was like people would say not verbal but in they actions like "Uh-oh, here they come" and people would cross the street. The movie had an effect on me like that. Then you have Tupac talking before he died when he was in prison, showing and telling you about what they

think of thug life, and what it is to him and he said, "It's not an image; it's just a way of life — it's a mentality." It was all about self-expression. It shows the world is a ghetto, your head can be a ghetto that you don't wanna let go of as far as your thinking and the way you go about things.

He felt he couldn't and would never betray the ninjas in the streets, because they were there for him, they loved shhh — we loved him and we didn't even really know this man only through what he told us through his music, and he said, "When I'm dead and gone the street ninjas will understand."

They say his antics were self-destructive and he said they made him a man more than he had ever been. He had built and molded himself. To us and to him thug life and being an outlaw was an everyday thing. It was just that nobody never addressed it like him, and they made it seem like it defined death. Most of the times it is 'cause he lived the best of it and the worst of it. He said that he was gonna die trying to tame the demons inside of him. It also talks about some of the cases he caught, and it showed during the trial he got shot up when he was suspected of shooting two off duty cops in Atlanta.

"Thug Angel" also shows his spiritual side of things. It talks about what he said in the songs "God can you feel me?" "Take Me Away From All The Misery And Pain," and "I Wonder If Heaven Got A Ghetto," and "Only God Can Judge Me." And when he was talking to his mama asking her a question saying, "Mama, tell me am I wrong? Is God just another cop waitin' to beat my ass if I don't go pop?"

Talking about his judgment, he also talked about resurrecting and coming back from the dead. Then he changed his name to Makaveli. Then he states God is a killa too. He says don't get it twisted — God killed a lot of people too. Friends and family said they saw a change when he came home, like jail had eaten him up. Saying words like I'm hopeless, nobody knows about the good he did. He has a tattoo that states "50 ninjas" and what he said he meant by that was "When you go up against him it's like going up against 50 ninjas because I got the souls of all my ninjas in me." He said if you don't have nothing to live for, find something to die for. Tupac asked the question, "How long will they mourn me?" 'Pac knew he was gonna die and he knew what for, and that was thug life. He said one of his songs something about Bush and what's going on and how he predicted it in 2Pacalypse.

Most think he isn't dead because he changed his name but his mom said in the movie, "Tupac is where nobody can touch him, nobody can say he did this or that — he's safe now, let him rest in peace." Tupac got and wanted to be cremated and he wanted his friends to smoke his ashes. It shows survival and self-creation. It's like he died for us youngins to live, like he sacrificed himself.



**Just like Jesus was put here to deliver
God's word through him, Tupac delivered
God's voice and message through his music**

**Jason
Marin County Juvenile Hall**

Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban

My favorite movie is "Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban." I think it was a good movie and a good story, and I think it will be a good attraction to the USA.

Michael Orozco-Lopez
Metropolitan Correctional Center – San Diego

Star Wars

What movie has most impacted me and why? Okay then, good question. Here goes:

Upon first reading the questions for this particular editor's note contest, only one movie quickly came to mind: "Star Wars." It's such a popular movie, on such a scale that its been etched into the popular consciousness since it was first released. However, this movie impacted me not so much because of its popularity, but because of reasons surrounding the movie's popularity at a time in my life where even getting to see a movie became its own drama.

When Star Wars was released, I was twelve years old, and not a boy my age missed the chance to see it. Word of mouth (as well as media exposure) spread through the elementary school that I was at the time attending, having its effect as it would upon me. The allure of Star Wars had built itself up steadily in me like some downtown building construction project; slow. I had been unable to see the movie, so patience that summer was the companion that reminded me all in its good time, even as the days stretched into weeks. And, in "kid time," this dragging on of time became its own suffering, apart from the undisciplined restraint I had somehow to show and endure. It was 1977. I was in summer school at the time, and I remember that that summer it seemed that I was being held captive by the group home, a placement called Hathaway Home for Children, I was placed in by the courts.

You see, for some time I had been in Hathaway, a ward of the child welfare system, of Los Angeles' labyrinth monster. I felt held captive by a repressive entity that constantly grinded against my twelve-year-old sensibilities. There were so many rules that cuffed me into corners that were opprobrious to my mental and spiritual growth. Often I felt stunted into feeling despair about what childhood was for others as wanting for me. In Hathaway, there were so-called rules and regiments, that through art is where I sought what life denied me. Therefore, as it were, movies had to be approved of before myself and others at Hathaway were allowed to enjoy a movie, especially as it applied to PG-rated movies, as Star Wars was. To give you an idea of how closed the minds of staff at Hathaway were, such innocuous things like Mad Magazine were prohibited, as were much literature, like "All Creatures Great and Small," and even novels like Ian Fleming's "James Bond." I understood to some extent the need for parental controls. However, some of these restrictions went so far as to seem vindictive of childhood. Often times, therefore, I was of the persuasion that the name of the game was to not let this applied policy of oppression get me too down, but rather to find ways around this system, persevering more and more through this sanctuary of mine called art.

So, as Star Wars the movie was prohibited to me, through magazines, posters, and such, I experienced Star Wars and expressed this desire through the voluminous Star Wars art created throughout that summer of 1977. I inundated myself with every and anything Star Wars. The movie had an enormous impact upon my generation in 1977.

Art, for some time, settled itself upon me as more than a passing fancy, such that family, friends, and staff encouraged me along that path with praise, and sometimes even with art supplies. Everywhere it seemed fledgling talent was encouraged, but none more so than from within where my heart guided me into dexterity beyond what my skills should have been. I became impassioned in my Star Wars art. This popular movie, denied to me, nurtured my hurts through art I created with the various Star Wars characters, and the awe of them to my young mind.

That summer came and went. I had endlessly heard the exclamations and praises from all my peers that summer school session at an elementary school down below the ravine of Hathaway, in its shadow. Though Hathaway had its own on-grounds school, I had, through academic achievement, earned public schooling. Therefore, as summer passed and autumn

came, I found myself suddenly in a twist of fate with an opportunity perchance to finally get the cinematic experience of Star Wars. Even though I had by then done all I could to experience Star Wars, the movie experience had still eluded me, and that was all I savored.

The opportunity came about in circumstances that put me in the driver's seat as it were. Someone or other at Hathaway thought it somehow necessary that I pay some visits to a psychiatrist. Why, I could not fathom. Upon first being approached by the idea I balked. "Why," I said, "do I need to see a psychiatrist when I'm not crazy?" Eventually it was impressed upon me that "normal" people, too, see psychiatrist. Her name was Beverly, a "houseparent" staff member there at Hathaway, who could better be described as a case manager in charge of the unit at Hathaway I was at. She proposed to me that if I went without incident to a month's worth of appointments to see the psychiatrist, I would be rewarded with her taking me to see Star Wars. But this only came after I was called from my class there at San Pasqual school to the principal's office for a medical appointment. When I was met at the principal's office by Beverly, she only divulged that it was a medical appointment of some kind. Because we would be traveling from Highland Park (in Los Angeles) to Beverly Hills for some mysterious medical rendezvous, my curiosity was more than aroused. However, as soon as I found out what I was really there for, I bolted from the office into the stairwell of the building. Being that I was up some stories, I had some way to go before I would reach the bottom. As chance would have it, Beverly caught up to me on the stairs, and apologized for the angst created by ambushing with the psychiatrist, but pleaded to me that this was the only way she felt she could get me to come. The conversation then quickly came around to the reasons felt by her and others why this should be, and why this would be a good thing for me. As a token of her good intentions, she proposed to me that if I completed some four sessions with the shrink, afterwards I would be rewarded with going with her to see Star Wars. Immediately I was sold on the idea.

After my last session, as promised, I was treated to my biggest of wishes: to finally get to see Star Wars, and of all the places to see the movie, it was none other than in Hollywood at the world-famous Mann's Chinese Theater. What an experience that was, let me tell you. In front of the theater are all these cement hand imprints of all the countless glamorous, and famous, people from Hollywood. Like any good tourist, I too leaned my hands into the castings, comparing my hands to the ones embedded in the cement.

Finally, it was time to go inside and watch the movie. As we purchased our tickets and made our way to the inside of this vast theater, we were met by more of Hollywood in the guise of memorabilia and posters of legendary movies. Amazingly, the theater was largely alone, and so we got to pick the best seats in the house, near the front. Beverly was very kind and accommodating, enhancing the experience.

Finally, the movie began with its famous beginning where the words appeared front and center and drifted slowly into the background of space, paragraph after paragraph. Suddenly then, the movie begins with its actioned sequences so lifelike to me that there and then I was absorbed and lost into that world of Star Wars. The movie was more than even the art I created in its place. It was the greatest cinematic magic a boy could ever hope for.

No movie has ever had the impact on me like Star Wars did. From angst to fulfillment, that summer/autumn of 1977 will forever be etched into who I am, because in deprivation, through art, I persevered to a wish fulfilled. In concluding, I can honestly say that the effect this movie had on me and honed my art to where I am today because of them.

Obstacles are what they are, but through art, I hurdle onto the finish line — albeit maybe not first, but to even get there is the win.



The Power Of One

I would have to say this is my favorite movie of all time. It's about a little boy in South Africa on a farm with his mother, a nanny, and the nanny's son. The father had passed away.

Well, the mother was getting sick and could no longer look after her son, so she sent him off to a school. The movie takes place in the 1800s when the German, French, and Dutch all took over South Africa. Anyhow, the boy was sent to this school where he was beat up and pissed on a number of times. They pissed on him because his name was PK and they abbreviate PK for "Piss Kup."

Well, after a while, his mother also passed away. The boy, PK, felt alone and empty. After the burial of his mother, PK was sent to live with his uncle. His uncle was an educated man and taught PK a lot. One day the police came and took PK and his uncle and put him in prison for being English. There they are, PK about eight years old or so, in prison.

Well, since they were not African, they had special privileges. They got to have a piano and plant a garden and things like that. Well, PK was watching a couple of fighters spar in the boxing ring. The uncle asked PK if he was interested in learning how to fight. PK said yes — this is where Morgan Freeman comes in.

As time went on, so much had happened. PK became number one in the boxing ring. An officer approached PK's uncle and asked if he could perform a concert for the general of the prison. At first, PK's uncle was unsure and really didn't want to do it. But Morgan Freeman overheard their conversation from the background and insisted that the concert would be a great idea, so PK's uncle agreed to the concert.

It was supposed to be held within a couple of weeks. As the days went on, PK and his uncle were writing song lyrics and tunes to be played on the piano. When their notes and lyrics were completed, the music was rehearsed. The lyrics were written in an African language, and if I remember correctly, it consists of this: "Himbohambo, himbohambe, himbohambo, himbohambe, adieta abudiana, himbohambo, himbohambe, himpohambo, himbohambe." Translated in English, it means, "They run this way, they run that way, they are cowards, they are afraid."

The night of the concert has come. It was supposed to be a special night for all the African prisoners. The uncle began pressing keys on the piano and PK following along with the beat. Then the lyrics began. Morgan Freeman wasn't at the concert; he was in the laundry room doing his thing with a bunch of tobacco leaves. As Morgan Freeman was done with his issue of business, he just walked out of the laundry room and was caught by an officer using the restroom. This officer did not like Morgan Freeman whatsoever, for whatever reasons. He placed Morgan Freeman against the wall and made him translate the words of the song. The officer did not like the words — maybe because the song was all about the officers of the prison. The officer then beat Morgan Freeman to death.

PK felt something had gone wrong and ran off the stage in the middle of the concert. PK ran towards the laundry building only to find Morgan Freeman in a puddle of blood, struggling and gasping for his last breaths. Morgan Freeman died in PK's arms that night of the concert.

After that, PK's uncle got word that the war was over and he could return home. He was happy. As for PK, he wasn't as happy 'cause he had no one else in life. Where was PK going to go and to who? Nobody! PK was now of age: he's going to a private school somewhere still in

South Africa, in school and still boxing.

One night, PK was in the boxing ring smashin' this other cat. Ding! Ding! Ding! The bell rang. The fighters went to their corners. PK happened to be scanning the crowd and caught the eyes of a pretty red headed girl. PK's attention was all on her after that. The bell rang again and they started chunkin' 'em again. This time, unlike the other round, PK's opponent knocked PK to the ground. Everybody's screaming and yelling for PK to get up, but PK could only hear the words of this pretty red headed girl. She said, "Get up, get up." PK got up around the count of seven or eight and took off on dude something vicious!

The bell rings again and PK's eyes still stuck on this girl. Time to get back into the ring. While PK was fighting a song was being sung from outside of the building, which took over the voices of the crowd. They stopped fighting to listen to this song. Well, this song was being sung by a whole lot of Africans. One man emerged from the singers. PK recognized him as a man from the prison they were at together years back. The singing suddenly stopped; then the fight was on and crackin' again. PK knocked out other dude.

After the fight was over, the man from prison had come up to PK and a few words were exchanged. A bus of police officers were driving by and stopped to ask if the African men were bothering PK and his friend. PK flipped the script and made it seem the African men were his servants, then sent them off on their way. PK had saved the African men from a severe beating that night. The African men were very thankful for that move PK made.

PK was so determined to find out who this girl was. PK found out who she was. She was in a private girls' school and her father was a rich and powerful man. PK crept into the girls' private school and she was scanning the stars on her balcony. PK figured a fast and quick way to her two-story balcony. She was in her room, back turned from the balcony; when she turned around to find PK sitting on the ledge of the balcony she was very surprised. He asked her to go out with him. She said that she couldn't. He asked why. She said her father would object to it.

So a couple days had gone by and PK worked up the courage to approach the girl's father and ask for his permission to go out with his daughter. He objected like she said he would, but the father's objection did not discourage PK any bit. In fact, it only made PK's determination much stronger to go out with this girl. She was just as attracted to PK as he was to her. They both rebelled against her father's word and went out together anyways.

PK was very much involved in the fighting club where black and white mixed. The police didn't like that much. One night PK and his girlfriend were teaching Africans how to read and write English when a storm of police officers kicked down the door and raided the place. Everybody was running around scared. PK's girlfriend was struggling to get out of the arms of an officer when she was struck in the head with a baton. It killed her. When PK saw the officer hit his girl, rage took over and he picked up a wooden chair, smashing it into the officer's face. Oh well for that guy. Anyways . . .

At the girl's funeral her father, with hateful teary eyes, was muggin' PK. PK felt ashamed as tears slowly rolled down his face. As the priest was reading scriptures from the Bible, a large crowd of Africans came out from the fields behind the burial site. It was the same group of African people at the building learning English the night she was killed. Even the man PK was in prison with was there for support. This made PK's eyes tear up even more. After all that, PK was once again feeling all alone in the world. Everybody PK had ever cared for or had love for

Lil' Spanks (cont.) Sacramento County Jail

continued from previous page

ended up dead or left him in the dust. To be alone.

No matter what the situation was, PK stayed strong and didn't let his loneliness eat him up. He kept going. He used all of that to keep going. I respect that. This is why "The Power of One" is my all time favorite film. I relate to this cat PK so much it ain't even funny. I'm gonna tell you why:

In a short version, my father was never around. He's serving a life sentence and is now in Corcoran. Although we keep in touch with one another through paper, it's still not the same. My mother, a heroin addict all her life, is too busy hustlin' for her next fix. I love her, but she's so damn scandalous. I was always back and forth with her and my grandma.

I grew up fast, kicked it with all my older cousins and their friends. So if you will imagine, I heard a lot and I seen a lot. In '97, I was about 11 or 12 years old and a childhood friend, Jason, was murdered in front of my house on Cinco do Mayo. When I seen that, I froze. Everything in my life turned into a negative perspective with me. I began to hate the world and everyone in it. I started going off and doing drugs, which I always had easy access to — my family, then, was doing things. Whatever I asked for or needed was given to me.

I was the youngest on the block and I stayed high — loaded! Well, everyone I knew was into drugs and bangin' in the 'hood. Everything was so easy to come by — drugs, money, clothes, and especially the females. All that caught my attraction at an early age. That's what life was all about, so I thought. I heard my uncles, cousins, and everybody else talk about being locked up — the Pen this, the Pen that. They made it sound like it was all good. I was eager to learn for myself.

I remember the date to this day: September 16th, 1997 I was arrested. Man, I was just a baby still. I did seven months — I got out and stayed out for a couple and boom! — in the Hall again. In and out, in and out — that's what

it was. All the same faces too, when I would go back to the Hall. B-6 in Santa Clara County. I grew up in juvenile hall. Then in '98, two more friends I grew up with were both shot and killed a block away from my house. My hatred was only getting deeper.

'99 — I spent that whole year in the Hall. I got out and it was on! Then this cat named Buddha moved in next door. I was 15 now; he was 22 already. He had a lot of influence on me. A lot! We kicked it hard together. He took me everywhere with him and introduced me to all his folks. He always claimed me to be his little brother. I liked everything that came behind that title. His "little brother"? Yeah! I was showed major love. He started pumping my head up with all that gangster shhh and I was soaking it all up.

Well, I had gotten arrested again, and when I came back home he was nowhere to be found. I was on the trolley one day going home from my little girlfriend's house and I saw his little brother on the trolley, too. So I hit 'em up and asked where Sammy was. He said, "He was murdered three days ago." I thought he was joking, but he showed me the newspaper clipping and there he was. Man, that broke me to pieces.

Then, a week later, a very close female friend of mine had shot herself in the head. I wrote a poem to The Beat about it — it's called, "When She Calls My Name." I made a promise to myself that I would never go to anybody's funeral again after hers. Her and I were so close.

See, everybody who I've gotten close to and learned to love, death has always been the one to overcome that. But I continue to live on. Why hasn't death come for me yet? Am I not good enough for it or what? No, I'm up in Sacramento County Jail looking at some crazy time. But know I'll make it. So if there's a chance of me holding a money order from the contest, coo'. If not, hey — I got other prizes and victories waiting for me.

God bless and one love.



Why hasn't death come for me yet? Am I not good enough for it or what?

Port Santa Clara County

My Favorite Movie?

There are tons of movies that surprise, shock, and scare. In this time and era of great movies, one that sticks out in my mind is "Saving Private Ryan." The sad war story of a platoon of soldiers on the American side of World War II trying to save the last brother of the Ryan family.

The war with Iraq comes to mind, along with the disturbing picture of the man getting his head cut off.

The movie shows a scene where an American and German are fighting in an old two-story house. At first it's more like they're wrestling. Then the German pulls a knife out of one of his many pockets. The German gets on top and is trying to drive the knife into the American's

chest. Slowly the blade falls and pierces the American's chest. The American dies while the German whispers to him to "shh." This whole time another American soldier is frozen with fear watching the whole thing.

The feelings and thoughts must be similar between the soldier and the family of the man who had his head cut off. Watching, while everything inside tells you to look away. Your brain is screaming for the pain to end. This is a horrid experience.

I wish no one knew pain of this degree and nature, but some are forced to deal with this burden. I'm sorry to anyone who has had to deal with this experience. Rest in peace to your loved ones.



The feelings and thoughts must be similar between the soldier and the family of the man who had his head cut off. Watching, while everything inside tells you to look away.

Kojo Sababu K. Muhammad
Corcoran State Prison

Malcolm X, The Movie

My favorite movie is the movie about the life of Malcolm X. The first time I saw the movie, I was in Salinas Valley Prison on lockdown. Why did it move me so much? Well, it moved me for the same reasons that it moved so many millions of people of color and poor whites living in the ghettos of America. Furthermore, Malcolm was able to clearly communicate the message of the poor and oppressed of the world, and that message was that the poor's needs, wants, desires, hopes, dreams, wishes, and their fulfillment is as important as those of any other soul in existence.

In regards to how this life, message, and story relates to my life, in particular . . . Well, from the gate, like myself, Malcolm was from the 'hood, the streets, the block. He had his homeboys' click and a gang that he ran with (he was head-busta). Based on those facts, we're coming from the same place. Thus, I feel, dig, and connect with Malcolm.

Next, Malcolm, like myself, upon entering prison, had a serious problem with the police, which led to confrontation, violence, and spending years at a time in a box that's smaller than a bathroom (solitary confinement).

And, like Malcolm, I eventually learned the lesson: As you become master of your emotions, attitudes, and actions, so all things, conditions, and elements become subject unto you to direct in a positive, or negative, direction—even prison.

Also, like Malcolm, I was attracted to the followers of the honorable Elijah Muhammad who were, and still are, one of the only positive elements in prison for people of color. Further, like Malcolm, I possess a natural intelligence, but not so-called textbook smart; thus, like Malcolm, I was given an American Century dictionary to read from beginning to end, and then put through the Nation of Islam education program, in which I read two books a week until I read the whole prison library.

And, like Malcolm, while involved in this education process, I began to understand and apply universal laws of

truth, such as: as you believe, so it becomes for you; life is the experience of your choices; spirit is the life; mind is the builder, physical is the result; and you must first save yo'self if you wish to save others from the traps within the ghettos of America.

Furthermore, like Malcolm, I became a living testimony that "Heaven is what you make it, and hell is what you go through." In other words, I realized that prison can be a tomb, in which one can lay down and die in, or it can be like a womb, in which the individual can develop in the way of knowledge of self, wisdom, understanding, culture, refinement — so that he/she is no longer savage in pursuit of happiness. Once this is accomplished in time, and on time, in accordance with the Creator's master plan, then the womb will give birth to you.

Most importantly, like Malcolm, I learned the amazing fact that a disposition (such as imprisonment) is not important, but what is important is your reaction to it. How you react here, and now, is the key that determines your destiny. If you react at the level of hate, resentment, or revenge, your reaction will create more of the same for your future. That will be your destiny. The cycle will repeat. If, however, you accept the responsibility for having created these events in your life, if you blame no one, nor yo'self, if you forgive each other involved and react with thoughts, words, and acts of love, peace, and forgiveness, then the universal laws of cause and effect "cause" love, peace, and forgiveness to come to you in the future. That will be your destiny.

In concluding, the movie about Malcolm X's life is a reflection of aspects of my life and countless other lives; we get born, we have good times and bad times, we experience a wide range of emotions such as desire, love, anger, and fear. We have various problems such as challenges that make us feel good or bad about ourselves. We learn some things, and forever wonder about other things, and then we move on into the unknown. This is truly just one story, and that's why it will always have a place in my movie shelf and heart. Until the end of time.



How you react here, and now, is the key that determines your destiny.

Randall T. Hale
Calipatria State Prison

My Favorite Movie

Let me paint you a picture of the land we call "freedom." A hundred lost souls aboard a boat made to transport ten. Their only desire in life is to be free, and so, from Cuba they set sail. They find out America is not all stars and stripes, but a melting pot of cultures searchin' for a life. They start off hard, working legit, but flipping the burgers really ain't cutting it, so they find a mark. They do a lick, their hearts become dark, but they sure come up quick. Then, Tony meets the winter; his mind becomes lost. He gets caught up in the "blow" life and his brain becomes frost. He starts to live the life of a drug-dealer. He has a new house, car and a plane; designer clothes, another line to go with the nacho stain on his nose, and he keeps cooling himself off by putting winter in his nose. His wife, too — too polluted to produce a seed. She can't find happiness, tho' the world is between her knees, so the world becomes his. Nothing stands in his way. You'll "say hello to his little friend" if you mess with his yay, face buried in a pile of coke, cash money high in stacks. Such a sad way to go: a shotgun blast in the back, another life lost to blow. You, too, can be Tony Montana. Just keep winter in your nose.

I grew up in Los Angeles, and in my heart, I was born

un-free. I started using drugs and slanging in elementary school. I'm sure any drug dealer can quote you "Scarface" word for word. In LA we are raised by thousands of Tony Montanas. Entered the world a pawn, crossed the board, and became a king. He got too into the "game" and got checkmated. It will always have a place in my heart because that life almost became me. For too long I chose the fast way, and I did so with no remorse. My whole life has been a street fight under broken streetlights, but one day I wanted to stop hurting those around me, so in prison I made a change. Calipatria level four made me grow fast overnight. You see, "Scarface" is just a metaphor, not a mark on one's face, but all the negativity scarring in one's mind, body, and soul. Life is hard and not always pretty. It is too real to get caught in the grip of the city, so my advice to my youth — find your own beat within, use your imagination, and conquer like kings. Educate oneself, support prison and home schooling, and learn the art of philanthropy. In the advice of William Upsi Wimsatt you can become a philanthropist, get into hip-hop activism, become a visionary, support community organizations, change yourself, and help change others. Pay it forward, so to say. Make a mark on society. Why vandalize walls when you can vandalize minds? Peace and love.



AR Ridah
SF/YGC

Love Don't Cost A Thing

Cheah, what up, Beat? It yo' ninja, AR Ridah. Tell you how I feel about this movie I watched. I really don't watch a lot of movies but for some reason, I liked this one. It's called "Love Don't Cost A Thing," starring Nick Cannon, aka Alvin, and Christina Milian, aka Paris.

Christina played a very popular girl in school and had a boyfriend named Shawn, who turned into a pro basketball player. So you know how long distance goes, and going pro, you get the picture.

Nick Cannon played a nerd who wanted to be hip and fit in so bad that he abandoned his true friends just to act like someone he not. He also was an engineer working on a project for his future, but put it all on hold just trying to fit, be someone he's not, all over a deal.

The deal was that the girl, Paris, acted like his girlfriend for two weeks so that he will pay for her mother's truck to get fixed, because Paris took her mother's truck when her mother told her not to be driving her truck while she was out of town. And we know hardheaded teens don't listen, so she drove the truck and crashed into a pole, and did not have the kind of money to get it fixed. That's where the deal comes. Alvin (Nick) took his hard-earned money, \$500. He saw Paris was in need of help at the repair shop, made the deal. He bought the parts and put them on the truck, and had her as a girlfriend for two weeks, and closed the deal. So here we go, starting with the two weeks.

The first day is always rough, trying to get to know everyone and getting accepted, so Paris tried to keep it just her and him for the two weeks, then she started to kind of get to know him, as the days into weeks went on.

So Alvin started to avoid his old good friend, to start hanging out with other people, trying hard to fit in. So he started knowing the ropes and dressing hip, hair twisted, talking slang, etc., so he could be down, hip, when he really losing something in the long run, and that's true friends, 'cause they don't come easy, and he and a lot of others learn that the hard way — just trying to fit in can change a lot about a person.

So Paris and Alvin became more close within the two weeks, and Alvin became known throughout the school fo' being cool (cool, meaning being hip and down, known fo' it, fo' whatever.)

Getting accepted was hard fo' Alvin, but now that he was known not as a nerd, but hip, he really fo'got about his friends, his future and Paris, and even how she felt. He started getting big-headed.

So now that the two weeks was over and Alvin was "in," they went out fo' the last night, and over the two weeks Paris got to really get to know Alvin. She helped turn him from a nerd into the most handsome, popular boy in school and started to have feelings fo' him — and Alvin was too big-headed to even notice, and he was with

her fo' the whole two weeks. (See, trying to be someone you not can hurt people around you, and even you can lose out on something that's important to you, even maybe your life.)

But all during the day of their last day, he was planning on how it would end. But Paris was trying to tell him that she wanted more of him being with her than just a deal.

All during the night, Christina (Paris) tried to let him know that, but he was too big-headed to even notice what she meant by saying, "Go wit' your heart." All Alvin talked about was how they should make a scene of their two-week deal over the break-up.

So the next day they broke up. When Paris was trying to talk to him before they did. Alvin was too cool, hip, and did otherwise of it.

But in all, he came to his right mind when Paris told the whole school about their deal while at the beach, and people he considered friends turned on him. Now he knew the feeling of being an outsider, but both ways — nerds not wanting to be his friend, and not fitting in wit' others, period.

So it was the last basketball game of the year and everyone was there, even the pro, Shawn. So at halftime, Alvin stood up and said the real about himself and the way he was trying to fit in, and the people he hurt while trying, and left the game wit' his old friend, giving him a hug.

While out the gym, Paris ran after him and told him how she felt about him and the way she'd been acting hip just to fit in, too. That's why she really was not able to come out and say how much she cared, because her self-pride, acting too good.

So you never know just how much a person can relate to you or even be in the same situation as you unless you stop being so big-headed and listen and look around. Be open to the people you consider friends and learn, because if you know it or not, how far will a person go to try and fit in. People will do some of the dumbest things to try an' fit in, sometimes not even trippin' off something you do can hurt others or even yo'self in the long run. Everyone tries fitting in, trying to outdo others. Just know no one can outdo you but yo'self.

I've been trying to outdo everybody by saying I don't need help. I can do by myself, live how I want. But all that time I'm trying to fit in, go here, can say I did that, you late (I'm better because I did that? No.). So I've been comparing myself to others, not being me.

That's the problem nowadays — everyone tries to outdo everyone, because of trying to be cool, hip, down. Better to be yo'self; can't no one stop that. Treat others how you want to be treated, and maybe, just maybe, this world would be a better place. Life is a gift, not a given. So just make the best out of life for yo'self, not no one else. It takes time, wisdom. Everyone has it. So do you, and use it!



Oba Frelimo
Pelican Bay State Prison

Better to be yo'self; can't no one stop that.

Malcolm X

My favorite movie is Malcolm X. The reason why this movie is so important to me is because Malcolm X is my relative, my kin. The power that the man showed in the movie was pure on all levels. As a hoodlum and as a brotha minister, I love the part at the police station — outside of the reason they were there. I dislike the way he was murdered yet his cross was carried. No other man

can fill his shoes.

Denzel played a good part. He displayed great skillsmanship on his behalf. All in all, it is a truthful movie. To see the Nation of Islam, strong men and women together in the movement, forces me to want to live better. To show a right and exact character, manifested in me, as one of Allah's servants and helpers although we know he needs no help, he is the all in all. Peace and blessings be upon all.



Life

The year this movie came out was 1999, but the story unfolds in the early '30s. Many of the heavyweights came together for this movie called "Life" — Martin Lawrence, Bernie Mac, Eddie Murphy and Anthony Anderson. No one person took on the lead role, though.

Throughout the movie, it focused on two characters. Eddie Murphy played Ray Gibson; Martin Lawrence was Claude Banks.

Whether it was fate or destiny, we will never know for certain. One thing is for sure: crime has a way of bringing people together — not so much in a sense for friendship, it was more of a spur-of-the-moment encounter many, many individuals around me are doing all day. They have a co-dependant who they can't even say they know — someone they happened to cross paths with one day, carved forever in time. Both go down for life.

Crime has no face, color, or creed. It don't matter if you're black, brown, green, or yellow — to find a partner in crime is easy. Never does it discriminate. But try finding someone to be with you, to help change your life — it will be as if you stepped in a ghost town.

At times, when alcohol was banned, the authorities enforced the laws of prohibition; overnight many hustlers became bootleggers, people just down an' out, whose luck had run out. Supply and demand sprung up on the down low. Many got into the action to fill their empty pockets. Unfortunately, the results of their actions landed them in a penitentiary.

Ole Claude and Ray met in the damnedest way, while at Spanky's Club, a place where organized crime members gathered to have a good time, to the low-level pimps an' players alike, mingling with the elite in this club. Everyone is kicking it, having a good time. Claude is having a few drinks with his girl. Ole Ray, recklessly eyeballin' the scene, and is looking for his next potential victim to pickpocket.

See, Claude was a square. You know, a soft brotha — just a night out on the town for a lil' excitement. He didn't roll with the homies, didn't have all the fancy tattoos.

I believe we've all had a Claude or two in our lives, someone from time to time who pops up on the radar screen. We remember and a smile comes forth. Ooh, hell, sometimes even a little tear will fall, too.

Claude heads on over to the restroom, as Ray locks on to his target. Spanky's crew beat Ray to the punch. They corner Claude in a stall, take all his chedda. After much pushing an' taunting, they reach a compromise by stripping Claude of all his valuables. They depart and here comes Ray. He makes up a story of how they know each other from high school. In the process, Claude gets got for his wallet, by a diversion of pats on the back and hugs.

Spanky gets word that Claude is at his club, orders his bouncers to bring him outside — with Ray in tow behind — to settle his own outstanding debt. Ooh, Spanky is hot now — he ties up Claude in chains, by his ankles, plops him down into the water. Ray stays calm through it all. With no regard for his own safety, Ray negotiates a payment plan. Fortunately for Claude, Ray's quick thinking saves both of their hides.

See, everyone has a spirit of God in them. I don't care whom you speak of, from the hardened career criminal to the atheist who does not believe in God. Maybe that compassionate spirit stirred up inside of him. But whatever feeling or conscience existed, it was of God.

The agreement was for them to go pick up a truckload of booze to deliver to Spanky. That's how Ray Gibson and Claude Banks came to be partners in crime. Spanky provided the vehicle, an old school Model T truck. They mobbin' down the road, arguing like cats an' dogs. Claude insists on getting this bootlegging mission over as quickly as possible, reiterating the fact that he got to start his job as a bank teller.

Ray ain't havin' it. They take a quick pit stop, pull into the local restaurant — the smell of homemade pies lures them in. Before they could get the dessert on the plates, the owners made it quite clear that they were white-only pies. So Ray an' Claude do a 'bout face, hop into their ride, head on back down the road. It would have been too easy to go pick up their loot. They busted a U-turn on back to Spanky's place.

Oh, no — Ray always had a game. Ray was about having a good time. Low an' behold, after picking up their booze, loading it all into the truck, there just happened to be a tavern within walking distance. Claude got the honors of watching the booze, while Ray cut out for a night of fun-filled enjoyment.

What the hell? If you can't beat 'em, you might as well join 'em. Claude laces up his five-point toes, joins his buddy at the bar. The night is young. With their gas money in hand to burn, Ray quickly settles in on a card game. Claude, on the other hand, caves in to sexual temptations with a hooker. The night gets cut short when Ray, of all people, discovers he got swindled in his card game. He gets suckered for his ends by a waitress in on the con. Throughout the game, she would hand the other players cards by dropping something on the ground, pretending to pick it up. Ooh, Ray got scammed in his own game, and he was not a happy camper. Not only did he lose all his gas money, but in one final sweep of cards, he put his watch on the line and lost that, too, which had sentimental value, since his dad had given him that watch right before he passed away.

Claude an' Ray storm out the tavern in search of the individual who caught him slippin'. A short distance away, they found him lying dead in a pool of blood, his white suit stained red. Just a few moments earlier, the police had murdered him in a verbal dispute which got out of hand. Ray rifles through his pockets for the watch. Yeah, Ray found the watch, but their luck had just run out.

At that time a bunch of good ol' boys stop them congregating around the body with guns drawn — no chance on being the hero, no chance of making a run for it. They marched them off to the local sheriff's office. The sheriff was in actuality was the real killer, making a mockery of the justice system. The sheriff was sippin' on the brew they confiscated. It was time to set them up for murder. Someone had to take the fall. It just so happened Ray an' Claude were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The next day they fell victim to the game, tried in a kangaroo court. Damn, homie, sounds just like my case, innocent until proven indigent. Their pleas of innocence fell on deaf ears. The corrupt judge dished out life sentences to both of them, laid down his ugly head at night, went to bed and slept like a baby. You would think he would toss and turn. You would think it would haunt him a lil' bit.

Can we keep it real? Judges are just an arrogant bunch, void of feelings. It don't haunt no judge when the accused return back in their courtroom decades later. They're forced to throw out their wrongful convictions — but no admission of any wrongdoing, no apology.

We have a prison system with two million inmates. The courts are not in pursuit of justice; the courts are in pursuit of revenue. See, courts are like finance companies, where the poorest members of the community are their customers, in which they pressure us to pay money we don't have. Given an ultimatum to pay up or to grease the wheels of the system or go to jail, most end up in jail. These convictions are designed to grease the wheels of the system. When the next person comes along, they scare them silly by using these convictions as examples, by saying, "You don't want to end up like so an' so."

Why change a system with a 90 percent success rate for felony cases that end in plea bargains? Did you know the court system would collapse if people forced their hands? Made them take it all the way to trial?

Brandon Martinez (cont.) California State Prison - Lancaster

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Hey, don't quote me on this, but it is my belief that we won't be seeing many judges, political figures, or lawyers in heaven, because God is not a respecter of titles. He will remember. They're trippen if they think for one second their little human will is strong enough to stop God's divine will. They lost their minds. They must have bumped their heads or something. Get the heck out of my face with that crap, period, with one-way tickets aboard the Grey Goose.

Ole Claude an' Ray, stripped of their last remnants of street clothes, arrive to Mississippi's penitentiary. The welcoming committee stands by to stare them down, smell the fresh meat, as they get issued some old school black and white striped clothes. Any attempt to turn away is met with a bullet.

Should you cross that boundary line an' live to talk about it, you could consider yourself very lucky. Prison back then wasn't laced with electric fences. There was no three hots and a cot. You grew your own food. If your crop didn't sprout up, oh, well, you starved. Space was to a minimum; living areas got lined with bunk beds. Fights were common over whose space was whose. Doing time in those days was more hard labor on the chain gangs, extreme conditions in the sweltering heat, working the rock quarry, swingin' axes and McClouds.

Nowadays, it's a blessing to even see grass on the yard. This dungeon I'm in here at Lancaster has a graveyard. Digging a tunnel through mountains to pave the way for railroad trains, them conditions for the prisoners were flat-out brutal. So don't complain of a harsh prison environment. If you feel life is miserable as hell, just count your blessings. I don't know about you, but as for me, I'm going back to the altar, even when I got to go all my myself.

I love my family, but if momma don't go, I'm still going. If sista don't go, I'm still going. If brotha don't go, I'm still going. If friends don't go with me, I'll go all by myself, because I know, no matter where I'm at, His eyes are on the sparrow. Yeah, His eyes are on you, lil' sparrow, even in that prison cell! If you get nothing else, remember His eyes are on the sparrow.

A few months, years in prison is never easy, let alone a life sentence, especially when you ain't ever been to prison. Talk about a cultural shock! For Ray, it was the normal revolving-door cycle; for Claude, it took some getting used to.

When that judge hands down that life sentence, it overwhelms you in an instant, almost sucks all the life out of you. You never come to terms with it and accept it, because in the back of your mind, you hold out for hope. You pray that things can and will get better. Success is the greatest revenge you could give back to the enemy. The enemy is anyone who hates you, wants to see you give up and die, hinders you from getting to your destiny. After a while, you learn to survive through pure hell. You're just too busy spending decades to exonerate yourself. You got not time for the low, low, low inmates. You rise above your circumstances; do your best to stay above all the drama.

Claude held up hope in his appeal. He figured the courts would lean in his direction. Years earlier his girl tapped his cousin, who was a lawyer, on the shoulder. Out of the blue, Claude got a piece of mail. The Court of Appeals rejected his appeal. To add insult to injury, his cousin, the lawyer, ended up being with his girl.

Claude never asked his cousin to do a going appeal for him and Ray. He felt it was all Ray's fault. Throughout the decades, them two forever bumped heads. In those days the prison threw everyone together — it didn't matter if you were co-defendants. Today when you get put down you could never even be in the same prison as your co-defendant.

Ray an' Claude did some hard times. Eventually things got better, as they progressed on down to a more minimum-security prison. Ray cooked up the schemes of plots to

escape, ending in failure. One time Ray's great plan of flying a crop duster plane to freedom, crash-landing a short distance from the prison, got them another visit to the hole. Claude just shook his head and laughed.

In another futile attempt, Ray talked Claude into making a run for it, dragging Claude through swampy water. What awaited them was an endless forest impossible to navigate through. Hot on their tail were man-sniffing bloodhound dogs. Ole Claude an' Ray were caught. Another trip to isolation.

You couldn't help but to give these two their props, though. At a minimum, you always got a good laugh. Then, again, you had to wipe that smirk off your face real quick. When you saw first hand the only way out was in a box — that was their greatest fear, to be buried out back with a little stick and a number on it. But you either conquered those fears or drove yourself insane.

The greatest past time was baseball, where you could kick on back, stuff your face with hot dogs, pop some peanuts in your mouth, make a big old mess with the shells. Even behind prison walls, scouts looked high an' low in search of the next talent. Claude took on the role as baseball coach. The goal was to win the championship against the other prison teams. At that point in time, everyone enjoyed a big phat BBQ, in which they went on to win time an' time again. Once a year it was something to look forward to.

Others didn't need an incentive — anything to take their minds off prison was worth looking into. Their star player was a deaf inmate they gave the aka of "Can't Do Right." He consecutively hit home runs to bring the team to victory. But Claude saw the bigger picture, to ride the coattails of Can't Do Right. When Can't Do Right got selected for the major leagues, as fast as Can't Do Right got his ticket out of prison with a full pardon, to go on the big leagues, Claude's hopes and dreams were shattered, when Can't Do Right left him behind. Some birds just ain't meant to be caged. I think a part of Claude left with Can't Do Right. He was never the same after, with his head hung low, just drifting day by day after day.

Ray raised the spirits of everyone with his lavish stories of his imaginary Boom Boom Room. All the glitz and glamour put smiles on the least of these. Ray had to keep his dream alive, to own the best club in the city. These nightly sessions often kept the juices flowing. Many nights, though, his tales got cut short by the jailer, but that didn't prevent the story from going on. It was his story. Yeah, he told it. Ray told it well.

Years passed. Their hairs turned to gray. Their steps got shorter. Talks between Ray an' Claude ground to a halt. Most times a nudge on the shoulder now, was all the two could muster up. See, now it was getting late in the evening. Both were too old to be on the mainline. Ray an' Claude got a transfer to the infirmary. That demon of death was peekin' up from the bushes. His eyes glanced for his next victim slippin' — a heart attack, clogged arteries. Death is never picky; natural causes will do just fine. Claude was tired of hearing of Ray's brilliant master plans. Old Claude was running out of time. The nurses would pass by Claude with his eyes closed, singin' old school gospel songs. His favorite was "The Upper Room." Only by an act of fate did they come back together to restore their friendship.

Claude had a flashback to forty years earlier, when Ray and he were denied pies on their bootlegging mission. A free staff had placed a cherry pie on the windowsill to cool. The aroma was too much for Claude. Claude was prepared to die trying to reach that pie. He would not be denied this time. Come hell or high water, Claude makes a mad dash towards the pie. The gunner opens fire. Bullets fly past his head, dance around his legs. None hit Claude. He snatches the pie, dashes around back of the building, out of the line of fire, dips his hands all in the pie, scoops handfuls all in his mouth. With no chance to cool down, the pie sets his mouth

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on fire. Claude screams in agony, curses his attempt to satisfy his taste buds.

Now the guards didn't find this a funny matter, so they came up with a creative form of punishment. Claude was placed on Coke bottles. A gunner sat nearby, ready to shoot if he fell off the bottles. Now the officer asked for a volunteer. Since none was forthcoming, Ray Gibson was selected. His job was to watch Claude, shoot 'im if he fell off the bottles.

But Ray wasn't going out like that. Promises of freedom couldn't even lure him away from his loyalty to Claude. The gunner hands Ray the gun. Ole Ray responds, "Boss, you don't want to give me that gun. To be honest with you, I'd shoot you with it. I'm a man, I ain't no bootlickin' trustee."

That honorable moment in the movie got Ray his own set of Coke bottles, right next to Claude. Claude jokes with him that he would of jumped on that offer for freedom. It was a sight to behold, worthy of a Kodak moment. Two old men forever bonded together by respect. Then Claude gets his toe stuck in the bottle. Those two were something else.

Bright one morning a guard notifies them of a transfer to oversee the warden's grounds. Prison guards have the darnedest sense of humor. The officer goes on, "Every morning I wake up hoping Ray an' Claude would die in their sleep, and every morning you two disappoint me. Pack your bags — you are the new caretakers."

Quickly they tend to their duties with a charm — trimming hedges, watering, mowing, etc. Truth be told, the real reason for their presence was to keep the warden company, engage in idle chitchat. In one such conversation, the warden asks Claude, "How long you been here?"

Claude responds, "Over forty years."

The warden shoots back with, "That's a helluva long time for any crime, even murder."

Claude says, "It's even all that much longer when you're innocent."

The warden says, "Half the guys in here say they're innocent."

"You got to forgive me if I don't laugh," Claude says.

A short time after this, vindication day arrives. Claude rolls out the ride. Ray takes a double take, tells Claude, "What the hell do you think you're doing? You haven't drove in over forty years."

The driver got sick and the assignment was given to Claude to go pick up the new associate warden. Claude an' the warden get to the Greyhound bus station in due time. The warden steps out the ride in search of the AW, leaving Claude alone, trusting that he would stay put.

It was the first time in decades Claude had been around free people. He looked in the car's mirror. His life began to flash before him. Claude asks the dreadful questions. "Where did all the years go? Where did I go wrong? Why did I end up in prison, doing life? If only I had done this, if only I had done that." Claude's eyes began to water, almost coming to tears with what he saw — an old man in the mirror reflected back to him. His beard was mixed with gray; the wrinkles were set in place.

As Claude came to himself, he glanced from side to side. Families laughed together, enjoying a day in the sun. Others sat, eating ice cream cones. Young couples walked by, holding hands, while others kicked it, listening to the radio. Some just breathed in the fresh air. Lassie wagged her tail. Lil' Spot ran for the tennis ball, thrown by his owner. Claude saw rich folks, old folks, poor folks.

Snapping out of his trance, Claude saw the warden and new associate warden approach the car. To Claude's disbelief, it was him, the corrupt sheriff who was really responsible for that murder decades ago. Claude's adrenaline started to flow. As his heart raced, sweat trickled down. This was the

coward who had set him up, Lord have mercy.

Claude drives back in silence. He wakes Ray up by shaking him. Ray jumps up, startled. Ray is half asleep, still thinking he's dreaming. When Claude told him the news, Ray must have thought he was having a nightmare.

The next day, before the associate warden can even unpack his bags, all four go on a hunting expedition — no big fanfare, just to shoot down wild turkeys, geese. Whatever bird flew near their path was free game.

Now proving that the AW was the actual killer was another matter. But for old men, Ray Gibson, and Claude Banks, it was now or never. Finally the day comes to a close, when they gather up their trophy birds. Claude an' Ray begin to pack everything in the trunk. Then Ray hears a tune from his dad's watch. Forty years later that watch played that tune as good as the day his dad had given it to him. Ray asks the AW where it was that he got that watch. He comes up with some bogus lie about how his wife had given it to him for his anniversary. Ray ain't going out. "About forty years ago."

All hell breaks loose after those words — there was no turning back now. Ray yells to the warden, "He's got my daddy's watch! He was the one who killed that man forty years ago." The warden intervenes with his shotgun. "Is there any truth to what this man just said?"

The AW responds, "What difference does it make? The state of Mississippi got forty free years of labor out of him." The AW pulls out his gun to shoot Ray. Claude snatches it out of his hands in the heat of the moment. Chaos erupts all around. The sly lil' devil, the AW pulls out his secondary weapon from his ankle holster. The warden ain't letting that go down, blasts that fool to kingdom come with his own vigilante justice.

Ray goes over to retrieve his daddy's watch. Back at the warden's mansion, the warden cooks up a story about a hunting accident gone bad. They believe his story of being caught in the crossfire. After the dust settles, the warden pulls them aside. "Claude, Ray, I'm sorry, there's no way the state of Mississippi could make up for forty years. All I could say is that I'm sorry. I'll get the state to draw up pardon papers in the morning."

Unfortunately, the warden drops dead of a heart attack before the morning. Talk about a twist of bad luck. Ole Claude an' Ray, pardonless, return back to the infirmary.

This time Claude has a plan, but Ray brushes him off with, "I'm too old now. I ain't got any time left for a plan."

Claude, being the character that he is, comes back with, "Never thought I'd see the day Ole Ray Gibson gave up hope!" Claude ain't about to nail the final nail in the coffin just yet. With great annoyance and persistence, Ray gives in and listens to Claude's plan. The plan was to set the infirmary on fire, steal some bodies out the morgue, set them on their bunks, as if they were themselves. No DNA identification existed back then. As flames engulfed the building, Ray and Claude walked away, free. Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty; they were free at last.

Life, life, life, life. Tell me, how did I get life? Somebody done gone done me wrong. All night long. Ain't no telling when I'll get home. Time is slippin away from me. I got to get home. Got to see the dollar sign. Everything is gonna turn out fine. Tell me, how did I get life? Life? Life? Life? Life? I want to know. Everything that I hoped for is gone now, buried in the ground — all my hopes and dreams. Whatever happened to my master plan? I wouldn't have gone down this way. Oh, somebody tell me, how did I get life? Life. Life. Life. Life. While you're listening to that song, would you drop this in your tape player for me—"I Pray," by Amanda Perez. Peace out, youngstas.



Why change a system with a 90 percent success rate for felony cases that end in plea bargains?

David Siller

Elmwood County Jail, Milpitas

I'm disappointed in myself for accepting that role as to how I was and that's who I wanted to be like. I guess you could say that the movies made me believe in that bullshhh, that gangsters live forever.

My All Time Favorite Movie

Well, the question is what's my all time favorite movie. Right now I really couldn't say because I like all types of movies, but the one that came to my mind first was a movie called "Duke of Earl." I used to watch this movie all the time when I was a kid. Also, this movie called "Menace to Society." Both these movies are my favorites. I can't chose one of them, so I'll write on them both, or first I'll start with "Duke," 'cause that's the one I remember most.

The first time I seen this movie was with my brother Junior and all my best cousins. I was young, about nine or ten years old. Okay, so let me explain the way I used to see this movie. The plot was about these old-school gangsters that lived in San Jose. There was Duke, the main character, and his lady, named Shy Girl. There was Shy Girl's tutor, who, at first, wasn't even into the gang life, Duke's brother, and then all kinds of other people, right. Duke's 'hood was called Toker's Town. His opposite gang was called 18 Street. I don't remember all the names.

Okay, so Duke gets out of jail, right, and so the party begins. Duke meets up with his old friends doing his thing, right. Well, Duke gots to get fitted right, so him and his 'hood go to San Jose Blue Jeans. They're there shopping when all of a sudden these dudes come out of nowhere and started cracking Duke. Blam, blam, straight to the face. All around the store cats are getting down, a gang fight to the fullest, right. So blam, people started running out of the store when, blam, this dude starts yelling out of nowhere, saying things about God loves them, to stop fighting and give into the love of God. Shhh, you know Duke ain't hearing that, so he and all his homies shake the spot. It goes on with the same thing, a couple of more intense gang fights.

But check this out, Duke wants to stop, right, so he goes to the preacher to find out that his homie and homegirl is there. He's giving up his life to Christ, and now he wants his younger brother to stop, too, so he goes to the spot where his brother is at, and dang, some 18 Streeters are there. His brother gots a knife ready to put it down. Duke rolls up with his girl telling him, "You don't got to do this — (moving in between them) just stop and think about what's happening." Duke's lady, "Yeah, we just gave our life to Christ. It feels so good." (Duke's little brother turning towards her) "What you talking 'bout? Leave these fools alone? You know what they done to us. They got to pay." Turning around, he stabs his brother Duke in the side. (Boom, the two guys run off). Duke's lady, "No! No! Duke, no! Duke, no! Please, not my Duke!" Duke's little brother, "No, Duke! I didn't know! I didn't mean to! No, Duke! Duke, I love you Duke! Duke, don't die! Duke, please, Duke, don't die!" The screen dies and Duke dies by his own brother's hand.

Can you see me during the moving yelling out, "Yeah, get him, tear him up. That was cool, huh, Junior?" Or "Dang, brother, I'll never do that to you. Dang, that was messed up. But hey, did you see that knife he had; it was so bad." Yeah, that was me, that was what I wanted — to be having all that fun. They showed all the parties, all those girls, that was

gonna be me.

The whole purpose of the movie was to show you God works even for gang bangers, but do you expect me to see that message? Hell no! What message was there? No message for me. Heck, let's go out and play gang bangers. Hell, no! WhatHell I'm from Toker's Town. Yeah, here's the guns, bang, bang, bang, bang, you're dead. No, no, gang bangers don't die.

Yeah, that was the movie we watched as kids. I guess I knew even as a kid that that's the way I wanted to be, the biggest, baddest gangster of all. It didn't matter that at the end Duke dies by the hand of his own brother. And you know what? In a lot of the movies I watched a lot of times, a brother had to kill a brother, a cousin had to kill a cousin, and best friend had to kill a best friend. But do you think I really noticed that little fact? Heck no! I blocked out all the bad just to see the so-called good that I was so fascinated with.

Okay, so I don't want to get carried away just yet. Let me tell you 'bout "Menace To Society." Dang, this movie was crazy. Ok, so check this out. Me, my brother, Junior, and my cousins, Andrea, Arena, and Robert, used to all be real tight, right, okay. So then you had the characters in the movie, right, and for every guy in the movie, there was one of us that the others said reminded them of one of us.

Okay, so now there was O-Dog, the youngest one, that was me, and then Kane, which was my brother. The others I really don't remember, but this hits me kinda hard 'cause in the movie, O-Dog shoots a liquor store clerk in the head, robs him, takes the videotape, and shoots dude's wife. Kane, O-Dog's best friend, is not as crazy, but pretty damn close. He's a drug dealer, right, and his cousin gets blasted right in front of his eyes. So O-Dog and Kane and a homie seek revenge. O-Dog receives a shotgun and Kane gets a nine, they run up on dudes, and boom, there goes dude's head. Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. Kane's letting the clip go on other dude that's running away, all while the fast food joint teller is screaming her head off, and O-Dog's yellin', "B, shut the f up." I'm not going to go into detail, but it ends with Kane packing to leave when some dude he stomped out does a drive-by, killing Kane and a homeboy. Well, O-Dog is returning slugs for slugs, not being touched by a bullet.

When they used to tell me, "Dang, D, that's you. O-Dog is just like you," I would smile from ear to ear, proud to be like this stone cold killer in the movie. So I did everything possible to prove my cousins right. But now that I think back, it's weird how close those assumptions were. My brother turned out to slang just like Kane slangs, and me, well look at me, I'm a young knucklehead going to the Pen for robbing a man at gunpoint.

I'm disappointed in myself for accepting that role as to how I was and that's who I wanted to be like. I guess you could say that the movies made me believe in that bullshhh, that gangsters live forever. Now I know that gangsters die just like everyone else, and a lot of times in a bloody mess.

Nobody lives forever. It's how you live that people remember.



Deshaun Lavender High Desert State Prison

The Blues Brothers

First off, the topic struck a chord and ignited a flame I haven't felt in a while. Memory lane is a trip if you haven't traveled down those roads, which lead to the contact of feelings of certain experiences in a while.

My favorite movie of all times is a film by The Blues Brothers. Yeah, you remember the "cat" John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd. The Blues Brothers is a classic, and if my memory serves me correct, I believe it debuted in 1983. I was young, ten years young to be exact, and within these tender years of physical and mental growth, outer influences are very impressionable to a young, developing mind.

The day was a Friday and I held deep into my imagination the hour, the minute, and second in which my school day would end. My uncle JP had promised me in the beginning of the week that he'll escort my younger cousin and I to the movies. Personally, I was enthused just to be able to hang out with my uncle JP, who was at that time my African-American idol. Finally, my school day was a wrap, and on this enjoyable Friday my uncle scooped me up and the only thing that was on my mind was the movies. You see back in those days the drive-in was the thing to do. My uncle drove a '68 Chevy Impala, front and back cut, too. Aw, man! It was on. In addition to the movie and drive-in itself, the "low-low" added to my profile of wanting to be a gangster like my unc', so the floss mode appeared.

I can recall this Friday evening, heading into the night, to memory vividly as if it were yesterday. After stopping at the spot to purchase a couple of "dime" bags and the liquor, the oldest of my cousins and I rode "shotgun," posted next to my unc', nodding my head back and forth to Zapp's "Heartbreaker." Upon our arrival, the Vermont Drive-In was packed, a long line of cars patiently waiting to be the next vehicle to pull up to the booth, pay for tickets, and enter the grounds leading to the areas, or sections, where the movies were being shown. Sitting in the car, receiving a buzz from the contact of marijuana smoke, I recall glancing up at the billboard that showcased the movies which were being presented for the weekend. Ultimately, my decision was made at my first glance and through prior experience with my younger cousin (he idolized me as much as I idolized my uncle). I knew he was going to ride with what movie his big cousin wanted to watch. Looking up at my unc', I said, "Me

and Lil' D want to see 'The Blues Brothers.'" He turned toward me and smiled (he was already high, smoking marijuana since his purchase), thumped me on the head and said, "We were going to watch that movie anyway." He turned around and took a sip of Satan and turned the music up even louder.

Why is 'The Blues Brothers' my all-time favorite movie? To honestly answer this question, the choice of my decision includes the movie to a large degree. However, the events surrounding the actual film itself have evolved into a commemorated experience in my life. You see, this minor family outing was the last time my uncle and I spent any quality time together. Soon, after this, he was arrested on suspicion of murder, which he was convicted of and sentenced to 37 years to life in the state penitentiary. We really enjoyed ourselves: eating popcorn, licorice candy, and those stale hotdogs. "The Blues Brothers" film was more interesting than I expected. It's definitely a "genuine classic," being a mixture of down home blues, comedy, friendship, and living out your dreams. The impact "The Blues Brothers" had on me was mesmerizing. I swear I've seen this flick over 20 times.

Whenever I view this film, whether I'm in the comfort of my home with a Blockbuster rented version of "The Blues Brothers," or I'm watching it on my 13-inch color TV sitting on the bunk in my cage, it lifts my soul out of the moment and transfers my spirit to 1983 all over again. Now, one has to admit it being profound for a movie to stir feelings as deep as the soul in an individual's body. It brings a reflective state, not a trance in which one is lost in time, but an elated feeling of a pure, untainted experience. "The Blues Brothers" film travels deep in my heart. This movie presented an opportunity for a family to share time together, and connect as one in a common interest of being entertained.

Enjoy your loved ones company by creating the time to share experiences together. If there is one single thing that I've learned through revisiting my "Blues Brothers" experience it's: "A moment of time shared by true loved ones can be with you for a lifetime."

Thank you (Asante) for listening to my story, and may you all remain strong in our struggle to break free of ignorance, miseducation, and misinformation. Have a blessed day, for if you were allowed to open your eyes this morning, it's truly a blessing.

Strength, courage, and wisdom.



I somehow knew that there was more to the story of the black man and woman here in America

Kenneth Lee Broussard Texas Department of Corrections

My Favorite Movie

My favorite movie of all-time is a movie called "Roots."

I was always curious about my ancestors and our past as a people. I somehow knew that there was more to the story of the black man and woman here in America; more than the pimping, drug abuse, and black on black violence I saw in my daily life.

I was given the chance to take a black history course in 2001 here on my prison unit, and being inquisitive, I accepted the opportunity. The class was made up of mostly young black men, like myself, that had no idea of who we were as a people. Needless to say, we were a rowdy bunch. Our teacher was a middle-aged black man named Don Hill. When he entered the classroom, it fell silent. Mr. Hill had that kind of affect on people. He was a tall, well-built man with salt and pepper hair, and he carried himself with such regal grace that his mere presence commanded respect, and after one look in his intense eyes, respect him we did. Mr. Hill gave us a lecture on what we would be learning in his class and told us that we would be seeing several movies. I, along with my classmates, liked this idea because we only thought of the entertainment value of it all. "We got to watch movies while other students worked." My heart and mind would have never been prepared for the journey we were about to embark on called "Roots."

The movie began telling of our history as a people in Africa before the Atlantic slave trade. I was astounded at the beauty of the country in itself. There was beautiful, lush, green shrubbery

as far as the eye could see, pristine mountain valleys, and happy healthy people; not like the Africans I was used to seeing on "Save the Children" commercials. These people were kings and queens that ran empires. I was overwhelmed. It was hard to believe that we had once been kings and queens that ran our own land. A smile appeared on the faces of several students as they came to the same realization I had. As the film progressed, we watched as our ancestors were captured and subjected to some of the most atrocious conditions in human history. We watched as they survived the six-month journey of the middle passage, packed in the cargo hole of a ship like a can of sardines; we saw the beatings and lynchings. We saw how throughout all this, our ancestors persevered. I think the most dramatic part of the movie was when Alex Haley returned to Africa some four hundred years later and found his original family.

The movie was an emotional roller coaster for me. I had never been so happy, mad, and encouraged at the same time. Before seeing the movie, I ran around with no sense of self-worth or value for black life, using the word "nigger" like it was my second nature, like it was cool. I now know better, and it is because of the movie "Roots." I saw several men's lives in that classroom change for the better after seeing that movie. The movie will always be important to me because it gave me a sense of pride and self-worth, and instilled in me the courage to carry on the drama of my ancestors by being successful in life once I am released, and uplifting all people through positive influence.



Tyrone Toliver
High Desert State Prison

School Daze (by Spike Lee)

I was close, real close to being an actual teenager the last time I saw this movie. The summer of '89 I was 12 years old. The most important part of this movie to me is when Laurence Fishburne starts ringing the school bell at the end of the movie and the college kids all line up and front of him in like a military formation, and he starts screaming, "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!"

I started this off the way I did due to this movie made me wake up and ask questions about my heritage, because I have an aunt who is strictly white. Around the time, my cousin Linda rented this movie. She was headed to college. It's her mom that's white, but her dad is black. I saw her as Tisha Campbell's character, a mixed sister looking for acceptance, love, respect, and understanding, so she always associates with mixed friends or white people. That's exactly the way Linda is. The feud amongst the dark-skinned Africans and light-skinned Africans was so real that it was emotional at times, and pissed me off. You see, my mother's kids are medium-brown, and my dad's wife kids are light-skinned. When I was ten years old, I found out about my dad's wife and kids close to the same age as my mom's kids. I understood then that my mom wasn't nothing to him, and college was out of the question for me. You see, I was a baseball athlete and gymnastics was my favorite. I got honors after honors, but was poor and basically homeless. I always dreamed of going to college, but knew I couldn't.

Around the time I saw this movie, you could say Spike Lee's character, "Half-Pint," was me. He joined "Gamma Fraternity"; I joined a gang. He was very small in size and taken advantage of; so was I. He didn't have a girlfriend and the people teased him about it, and also being a virgin. Me, I wasn't a virgin, but had been molested by several female cousins, which caused me to reach strangely to female affections towards me, which got me teased. He did whatever the big brothers in the "frat" told him to do. I did whatever the "G's" and "OG's" told me to do.

The feud between the college campus dark-skinned and light-skinned Africans showed me stupidity runs through colleges as well. Just because you're getting a college degree doesn't mean you're immune to prejudice, especially amongst your own skin or background. You see everyone making fun of you, my brother and lil' sister due to we were poor and living amongst family member after family member. Seeing the light-skinned, high-class sisters making fun of dark-skinned, lower-class sisters made me cringe because I saw what my sister was going to go through. As she got older, my lil' sister is the only female species I can say I actually love, so to see that also taking place in college scared

me. She recently graduated in June, and what no one has ever told me was due to all the stress and emotional turmoil, she turned lesbian. She's never had emotional contact with a man due to her dark skin. Growing up, that's what I feared.

At the time of this movie, a lot of young black men were disrespecting black women like it was a trend, so when I saw Tisha Campbell's love being tested wrongly, as well as dedication to "G-Frat," I was upset. She made love to Spike Lee with the understanding she was bringing him into manhood for their brotherhood cause, but it was the leader's way of dismissing her due to he was tired of her. He wanted to move on. That was messed up. She was a dedicated sister, faithful to that brother. At the same time, I was not into disrespecting my sistas. Also, during this time, my girlfriend had dismissed me so she could move on to a guy who had better clothes than me, but even though Tisha Campbell was hurt, she bounced back emotionally and held "Half-Pint" at the ceremony light holding, and she also put one of the frat brothers in their place.

On the flip side, Laurence Fishburne's girlfriend was the darkest sista on campus, and her skin tone and short hair was the driving force of their relationship. Him and his frat bro' were all pro-black and hate the "G-Gamma Fives" — they were sell-outs to Laurence Fishburne and his boys. He hated that his little cousin, "Half-Pint," played by Spike Lee, was pledging "G5." It was a slap in the face to him. It was also a slap in the face to my family when I said, "Bump school, sports, and everything positive," and started gangbang and selling drugs. I wanted nice clothes and a beautiful girlfriend like Tisha Campbell's character. Like "Half-Pint" got accepted into "G5" and got to sleep with her, I got acceptance in the gang and slept with some of the most beautiful women in my neighborhood and outside due to I was a Crip. A frat...in my eyes! And the streets was the campus. Deceit and deceptive ways was education.

When I think about what ifs and maybes, it surrounds me staying in school and going on to college. I don't think about the if I hadn't got caught stuff. Being a gangsta gon' get cha caught — simple as that. But what if I had really been like "Half-Pint" — continued with school and sports once I hit the 8th grade, because that's when I made the 360-degree change? Instead of banging for acceptance, love, and friendship from the cool people, and stayed an educated, square, sports fanatic? Would I have gone to college and joined a frat? Would I have turned into Laurence Fishburne? A "G5" leader? A real "Half-Pint"? Would my type of girlfriend been all white like my son's mom? Or like Laurence Fishburne's girl? Better yet, a mixed sista like Tisha Campbell's character? If I could go back to my school days . . .



When I think about what ifs and maybes, it surrounds me staying in school and going on to college. I don't think about the if I hadn't got caught stuff.

Frank Ramos (aka The Kid)

California State Prison - Lancaster

The Last Of A Dying Breed

The wild boar zigs and zags, he dodges and ducks thru the thick forest. He dashes, he jumps, driven, through a sea of trees by the instinct of survival. But it is also the same instinct that drives his predators. As this battle of survival plays out, I ponder on the fact that even though it is not the swine's fault that he is lower on the food chain, it will most likely be the cause of his demise.

The year is 1757, a time where you have to farm, trap, fish or hunt if you want to eat. And to eat is the reason two young men are pursuing this creature. You would think this animal has advantages over his hunters, for he is quicker, more nimble, more agile. But, unfortunately for the pig, he lacks the intelligence of his predators. And that is why, unbeknownst to him, he is being corralled into a third awaiting man.

The wild boar never sees the axe streaming through the air. And he probably never felt it as it pierced his thick skin, killing him instantly.

The three men are the last of a vanishing people on the frontier west of the Hudson River in East New York. They are "The Last of the Mohicans." It is a father and two of his sons, one by birth and the other by adoption. The adopted son is Anglo by skin, but a Mohican by heart and soul. Which is one of the many messages this movie teaches us. It's not really where you're from, but how you represent.

The three men huddle over the animal and say a prayer, for it is the way of these kind, indigenous people. They are paying their respects and showing their gratitude to this animal for sacrificing its life so they can live on.

As Hawkeye Nathaniel (played by Daniel Day Lewis), his brother and his father make their way back to their habitat, they encounter a caravan of Anglos being raided by the Hurons (an Indian tribe). They immediately rush to the Europeans' aid, and are able to fend off the attacking Indians.

The caravan is on its way to a fort where Colonel Monroe is awaiting the arrival of his daughter Cora (played by Madeleine Stowe). The colonel's beautiful daughter is being escorted by Major Duncan. And, along with them, is a Mohawk Indian named Magua. The Mohawks are a tribe that are allies to the British, and he is along as a guide to the fort.

After some discussion, the Mohicans decide they will also escort the caravan, for they know it will be a dangerous trek. For not only do they have to worry about attacking Indians, they also have to worry about the French, the reason being they are now in the third grueling year in the war between England and France for possession of the continent.

And this, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, is how my favorite movie starts. "The Last of the Mohicans," a film based on the book by James Fenimore Cooper, far surpasses all other movies, in my opinion. It is about the last of a dying breed, and you rarely find movies these days with so much meaning and depth. I admit I might be biased because I myself am a hopeless romantic, and this is basically a love story. But not in the conventional sense.

You must really forgive me for not indulging you with some more details, but I am afraid I will take away from those that haven't been blessed with the opportunity of seeing this movie.

I will tell you, though, why I loved this movie so much. I compare this film to life because just as in life and in this movie, there's so many meanings and things I get out of it. The main thing I get out of this movie is that there is absolutely nothin' more important in this life than family.

It also taught me that in reality, love is what makes this world go 'round. The love for money, the love of righteousness, the love for power, the love for good, and the love for bad. And it all seems to balance itself out. This might not make perfect sense to you, but then again, does it really have to?

For all the people who haven't seen this movie, I beg you to please go rent it, or even buy it. I believe there's a lot to be learned and gained from this film. It is extremely entertaining. The acting is superb. There are some incredible shots of some magnificent scenery. There's basically a little something for everyone in this movie. There's romance, there's a lot of realistic action, not corny Hollywood crap. There's twists and turns, betrayal, drama . . .

Okay, okay. Fine. You're right. There's no comedy. But, jeez, cut a guy a break. Nothin's perfect, even though this film sure does come close.

"The Last of the Mohicans." Go check it out in a video store near you.

**Arthur Lee Henderson, Sr. (aka****Bakri Bilal Abdal Wu'min)**

California State Prison - Lancaster

Lady Sings The Blues

I'd prefer to tell you how moving the Malcolm X movie was. It was the story of Malcolm's life, as he evolved as a man of conscience. But, in keeping with The Beat Within's desire to stay truly secular, I'll opt for "Lady Sings The Blues."

Yes, I'm forty-one and old school. I first saw "Lady Sings The Blues" when I was a young teen, when it came out in one of those downtown Los Angeles movie theaters. Like so many of my young peers, I was both fascinated and moved by the life story of Billie Holiday, such a beautifully talented sister, and how drugs robbed her of her life, her self-worth and her love life. Yet, in keeping with the mindset of my crowd, I saw Billie D. Williams as true to the game and a hard-core player. I saw Diana Ross playing Billie Holiday as a lady in the game, who could have been anyone's gold mine but her own, because she was playing the role of someone born to be someone's prize lady of the night, from the stage to the bedroom, a steady cash cow. By now, everyone of conscience can see how badly I messed the whole story I and others bragged about endlessly.

I recently saw the same movie edited for TV viewing. I was prepared to turn from what I no longer viewed as cool. As a forty-one-year-old father of an eighteen-year-old beautiful daughter, I can see Diana Ross leaving that role to my own daughter, just as she is someone's daughter. Yet, I've realized that I've missed so much in the vast majority of the movies I've seen, so I watched through new eyes, the eyes of a man who loves his sisters and women in general. So I saw what I believe was a breaking point for Billie Holiday, Diana Ross's character. I'm sure I completely missed the scene when she exited her tour bus to answer the call of nature in a field deep in the South, and saw an African-American man hanging lifeless from a tree while a group of whites watched and conversed, as though he'd never been a human being. And poor Diana, who saw in real life what many of us had only heard about and saw on the printed pages.

Then I saw the second scene I somehow missed, the tour bus was rolling through a Klan march and nearly overtaken. I can only imagine the demons Billie Holiday must have lived with and been chased by, and how those experiences and her burning desire to chase down and capture the American Dream and become super-rich must have broken her self-respect.

Black people had no respect in the eyes of so many whites, not to say all white people shared the racism of their peers. Yet America was America, and her past is what it is, and Billie Holiday came face to face with her value to the men she was beholden to — the men who could get her booked to sing in the high fashion venues. So she felt drained and there was no room for her to be a human being. She had no right to absorb all the horror she'd seen. At the very least, she had no time to consider what it meant to be African-American in early America. So she accepted their drugs — heroin — and she found in her highs a new reality. She was the star. The African Queen. The Song Bird of America, and everyone, regardless of race, loved her. Billie Holiday belonged. She belonged to everyone except herself. Yet she never had to face that reality — until her high wore off.

I suddenly saw that one of our other African American heroes, Billy D. Williams, was neither playing the role of a hardcore pimp nor a drug pusher. That other African-American man was not Billy D. Williams. How I missed that I'll never know. Billy D. Williams was her man, her lover, her champion, her protector. Yet, now I know that when a man isn't rich and can't open more than car doors and the doors of one's home, many women see the other men who can open huge areas to them and concert halls as being more appealing, more suited to their needs. That isn't to say all women are easily misled. Yet, not one woman should be led to a life of destructive behavior.

Many women are strong and hold us men together as young sons, and if only we could see how a man is supposed to interact with a strong woman in a relationship, we'd become better fathers and husbands, because we'd see how a man handles heated arguments and not resort to violence or leaving the family, to find comfort in a bottle or the arms of another. We'd see how our manhood is neither ruined nor shamed if we lose the fight or are proven to have been wrong. We'd learn how to apologize and still shave the next morning, and take our same seat at the breakfast table.

It's strange how movies can reorient one's views of life and how life can change one's views of movies.



Raymond Wright (aka Anoint)
Mule Creek State Prison

The Super

“The Super” is my all-time favorite movie because it was based on the harsh realities of living in a impoverished, inner-city tenement building being run by a slumlord whose 40-year-old son was sentenced to a year of residency by a civil judge in one of its decrepit apartments — so he could see how it feels to live in a flat that has no heating for the gruesome winters in New York City to keep its tenants and their children warm, and no AC during the intense heat in the summer months to cool the low-income residents — in hopes that after being forced to reside in an unfit dwelling for a year’s time, the slumlord’s son, who manages the apartments, would convince his father to renovate the tenement building and bring its apartments up to living standards as mandated by law.

Although this movie was dealing with real-life issues, it also had a few comedy scenes scripted in it, making it more interesting to watch. For instance, there was one scene where a ten-year-old kid walked four flights of stairs up to the manager’s apartment to inform him that there was a freezing snowstorm outside and his grandmother and he didn’t have a working heater to keep them from freezing inside their apartment. Standing before the manager’s door, shivering in the hallway with his teeth smashing, the kid knocked on the door sad-eyed. The manager yelled for him to come in, so he opened the door, still shivering from the cold just to discover the manager was lying in the floor inside a heavy sleeping bag with an electric heater near him, maneuvering his buttocks closer to it, while a huge smile grasped his face as if he were enjoying the luxury of being able to fend himself from the cold, while his tenants had to freeze inside of their flats. The kid pleaded for him to furnish his apartment with adequate heating, but the manager just laughed before throwing him out of his flat. However, after the young boy left, the manager felt sad for mistreating him.

Other tenants made a host of complaints to the manager about the heating deficit in their apartments, and threatened to report his negligence to the judge because she had ordered him not to accommodate his apartment with any heating or an air conditioner unless he provided the same accommodations for his tenants.

Feeling remorseful for the tenants’ ill-treatment, the manager drove to his father’s lavish estate on Staten Island and asked him to order heating units to be installed in all the apartments, while they were feasting on an expensive steak dinner and sipping white wine. His heartless, bigoted father paused momentarily from eating and fumed, “Aw, who gives a damn about a bunch of whining kookoobos! In three

months, it’ll be spring, so they won’t need a heater. Go on, son; eat and enjoy your dinner.”

In another hilarious scene, the kid asked the manager, who was also referred to as the Super, if he could tote his grocery bag for him after they’d existed a neighborhood grocery store, which was also a well-known drug-selling spot. Thinking that the manager had purchased a package of drugs and concealed them inside the bag, the kid said he beat out fifty other guys for that job, and the manager relented and let him tote his bag, shrugging his shoulders in bafflement about the big deal the kid made over carrying someone else’s groceries. As they proceeded down the sidewalk with the manager walking with a swagger and trying to act tough, a tire blew in a car in traffic and it made a loud explosion like a weapon being fired. The tough-acting manager hid behind a nearby trashcan in haste after hearing the loud noise, while the kid continued to act normal.

Pausing briefly in front of the trash can, watching the fear radiate from the manager’s face, the kid chuckled: “What’s the matter, Super? I thought you walked it like you talked it? Why are you hiding? Didn’t nothing but a tire blow in a car.” After standing up and brushing mud off of his pants, the manager joined him on the sidewalk, walking funny, without his swagger. “Why are you walking like that, Super?” inquired the kid, “Did you crap in your pants?” When they reached the end of the block near their six-story tenement building, the kid handed the bag back to the manager, expecting to receive a fifty-dollar tip, but was disappointed when the manager grudgingly gave him a meager five-dollar bill.

At the conclusion of the movie, the manager was finally able to persuade his father to renovate the entire building, repaint it, and add an adequate heating and cooling system in every apartment. Prior to leaving the renovated housing establishment, the slumlord’s son appointed one of the tenants to manage the building in his place, putting him in charge of making sure every apartment remained in livable conditions after his departure.

To this very day, “The Super” still remains as my favorite movie of all-time due to it turning a heartless, bigoted slumlord who reveled in the benefits he received from oppressing his low-income tenants, into a caring, entrepreneur who’s concerned about his poverty-stricken, mostly black and Hispanic tenants that reside in his housing establishment. It was a very touching, emotionally charged movie that I recommend every slumlord should see. Hopefully, after perceiving its message, they would begin to treat their impoverished tenants fairly instead of further oppressing them because they were dealt a hard hand in the game of life.



It was a very touching, emotionally charged movie that I recommend every slumlord should see.

Juan Carlos Mondragon
High Desert State Prison

Groundhog Day

What would be my favorite movie and why? I guess I could easily name off some prison movie because I live in prison and I see it day in and day out. Thus, seeing this as an opportunity to expand my mind and all that I have seen and come to know, I would have to say that my favorite movie would be that of "Groundhog Day." The concept of the movie is great, and if you haven't seen the movie, then allow me to share a bit of it with you.

See, Bill Murray plays the main role, and in so, he's trying to hook up with this lady that works with him. The funny part is that they both are covering a Groundhog's Day celebration, hence the name of the movie. Needless to say, Bill hates the day so much he just can't wait until it is over with. However, the day continues to repeat itself. When it first started to happen, he thought it was hell. After awhile, he embraces the consistency of his day. He begins with trying to change himself for the lady that he wants to hook up with. That plan becomes very fruitful for him. He seemingly starts to win the heart of his lady over. Of course, she doesn't know the day is repeating itself, so when Bill finds something that doesn't work with this lady, or something that she doesn't like, he remembers tomorrow not to do this because he knows it's not going to help him get the girl. Just as when he finds something that works, he remembers to use it the next day. With life repeating itself everyday, he comes to win the lady over, but he also begins to be helpful to the other citizens of this small community.

One would think that this is just what it is: a movie that is solely to entertain you. Yet as with writing, I have come to see the point of everything that is played out, or just written. I have come to apply this movie to my everyday life in here. Now, you might think that this isn't possible. In the context of the movie, you would be right, but in my context, I believe it can.

I have lived within these confined walls for over ten years, and at first I hated this place, and well, the people in here weren't that friendly either. Mind you, this is my first time in prison and I was sent to California's worst prison: Pelican Bay State Prison.

In my young, but old, age I have come to understand that things do happen for a reason, and that life is what we all make out of it. Our personal morals are our personal morals. Our fate is that in which we can make out of it, so I have taken this movie and applied it to my current situation and everyday life. How you might ask?

See, every day that I'm in prison is a day like yesterday. Not only does it keep its consistency, but I've taken a role from Bill Murray. I live today to make tomorrow a better day. Not only do I do so for myself, but for those around me that I have grown to know and understand. Our life within these walls are often looked over, or merely passed by from those that don't know us, or understand us. I'm not trying to say that some of us are better than others or that some of us are worse. I do know that each one of us are different and act in different manners. Yet, we sit in a system that classifies us as a collective. We have yet to come into our own, but we have learned to follow the herd. I tell everyone that is near to me to watch this movie to understand how my life is. Then, I tell them to read this concept that I wrote based on this movie:

The consistency in my life is forever changed by simply writing this

Choices

I am often asked what my day is like. The best answer is: Have you ever watched the movie "Groundhog Day"? Well, that is my answer to you. I live a life wherein I attempt to make tomorrow a better day, yet the only thing different is that I never know what tomorrow will bring. It often reminds me of when I would ride a roller coaster with my eyes closed. You never know the dips from the bumps. We all know life is full of dips and bumps, but we, as individuals, must decide on how we approach the dips and bumps — for should you choose wrong, you're bound to find yourself in a rut. Once afloat, you're able to make a proper choice, yet when you're so overwhelmed, your choices seem to fit only the choice that you can make at the given time and under the given circumstances.

Once in life, I made many choices. Now, under the circumstances, I can only make a choice, yet when doing so, I make a choice today based on the interest of those I love, and myself, whereas I once made my choices based solely on my wants, not needs. The concept of a need and a want is very interesting when you really look deep into it, for a need is something that you must have to life, i.e. food, etc. A want is solely a lust that you chase to obtain, but you don't really need, i.e. a pair of \$100 shoes. I lust for a day to make choices. I hate the fact that I can make a single choice yet I know I have no room for error.

I state this for I climb a hill today, not only for myself, but for you. You haven't had to walk in my shoes a single day, and all in all, regardless of how my life has been and where it has ended up to this point, I am still a good man with morals and standards for that is the choice that I make. It's only one, but it's right one for me. Your life is what you make of it, but your choices are what's going to set its path. One single bad choice was made out of many that I could of made. I can only wish and help you stay away from one single wrong choice, only so that you'll still be able to make choices.

The consistency in my life is forever changed by simply writing this, just as yours is for being willing to read it. I ask that you don't feel sorry for me, but ask that you take the time to understand me, and give me a chance to be known for who I am, and not for the wrong choices that I have made.

See, every day that I'm in prison is a day like yesterday. Not only does it keep its consistency, but I've taken a role from Bill Murray.

TIMOTHY ALLEN SCHREIBER Timothy Allen Schreiber is a friend of Eugene Weems in Rancho Cucamonga State Prison. In his first essay for The Beat Without, Schreiber describes his childhood of abuse and loneliness, leaving home at age eight, living in any shelter he could find, stealing to be able to eat, and breaking the law to go to Juvy for a place to stay. He writes of the pain of his evolution, from being a racist Nazi low-rider, to having friends of all races, falling in love and having a family.

My Life

My mother lost custody of me when I was eight months old. She was graced with the return of her babe at five years old, but I was far from blessed. Between ages five through eight, I faced death numerous times, once as a sacrificial lamb, from my mother's hands! I was beaten and abused, planting the seed of hatred in my soul!

At the age of eight, I grew wise and hit the streets, living in abandoned cars, in the cupboards in carpports, in the river bed and any place else I could find. I was stealing clothes off of clotheslines, eating inside grocery stores, stealing car stereos and speakers just for pocket money! It was a cold, wet; winter and hunger pains were constant friends. I came up with a bright idea of spray painting on a wall and having someone turn me in! (Not so smart.)

So here I was--a scrawny, rag-tag lil' white boy, in the juvenile system of Los Angeles. Being scrawny and white in LA Juvy was not a good thing. I got beat up almost as bad at home, but all this did was plant that seed of hatred deeper! Tired of being victimized by all angles, I found a friend--that friend was the Nazi low-rider gang.

The Nazi low-rider gang helped me to cultivate that seed into a blooming garden! It got to the point that I hated everything, everybody non-white, and even some of them. I was so blind, so ignorant, that I would not watch sports, eat chicken, bananas, watermelon, ribs, or anything stereotyped Black. Wouldn't wear Nikes, Filas, Adidas, anything Black-related. If I went to your house, and you had company who was Black, I would have nothing to do with you! This same hatred went towards Jews, even my own mother! As time progressed, my mother was forgiven, but my racial mentality and my dedication to my family--Nazi low-riders, flourished! I climbed the ranks, became a shot-caller, and was content in my hatred!

Until one day, when my whole family--the family I poured my heart and soul for, for all these years--betrayed me, broke my heart, and sacrificed me to

another gang--leading to zippers on both sides of my neck, puncture holes in numerous parts of my body-- and a blessing I refused to embrace at that time.

I fought, once again, against everyone for four long years--getting stabbed, just to fight my so-called family some more!

But lil' by lil', the blessing began to shine brighter and brighter, to my eyes, breaking through the fog of hatred and ignorance, towards people who did nothing to me deserving this attitude, until the beautiful day, one of my most memorably best days of my life. The light shined through and I was no longer blind.

I began the long, hard road of transforming my life, changing my views and beliefs, and working on building the new me.

It has been a couple of years, and even though I still have a couple of areas to touch up, I have erased the worst of me and replaced it with a happier part of me.

I eat watermelon and all I've been missing out on, wear Nikes and Filas, love football and have found out that Black people are just like any other people. I have Eugene as a friend, and an ex-Crip as a good friend. I don't know any Jews, but one day I will have friends there, too. I am a Nazi low rider dropout, and am 100% happier than I've ever been.

I am now married to a beautiful woman who is proud of my progress. We have a beautiful eight -month-old daughter who strongly resembles a Gerber baby, and my wife is four months pregnant. We've bought a nice house, attend church, and are living like normal people do.

My ex-Crip friend has even held my daughter when she was less than one month old--now that is a change for me, but for the best.

My goal now is to one day become a teen youth counselor, so I can share in fuller detail the part of my past lifestyle, and the dead end it leads to, with high hopes and God's good grace, that day will come and help the hurting souls.



DR. ASKIA A. BARAKA The following creed was sent to us longer ago than we would like to admit, but the patient Dr. Askia A. Baraka has not held this against us; he continues to write and share his interest in our publication. We only wish all of us could live by these words. We look forward to printing more of Dr. Baraka's writings soon. He writes from High Desert State Prison in Susanville, CA, and promises to fill us in on the details of his life some time soon.

Our African Creed

We do not choose to be common men or women.

It is our right to be uncommon — if we can.

Weak seek opportunity - not security.

We do not wish to be kept citizens,

Humbled and dulled by having the State look after us.

We want to take the calculated risk — to dream and build — to fail and succeed.

We refuse to barter incentive for a dole.

We prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence —

The thrill of fulfillment to the calm state of utopia.

We will not trade freedom for beneficence - nor our dignity for a handout.

We will never cower before any master - nor bend to any threat.

It is our African heritage to stand erect, proud and unafraid —

To think and act for ourselves —

Enjoy the benefits of our creations and to fact the world boldly, and say —

This we have done

**I have
erased
the worst
of me and
replaced
it with a
happier
part of
me.**

J.P. DEPEW

Back again from the abyss at Pelican Bay State Prison more popularly known as the SHU (Security Housing Unit), J.P. Depew revisits The Beat with some more of his knowledge about the system. Depew has been in the SHU now for over six years and has been contributing to The Beat since 1997, when he was housed in New Folsom with our former correspondent and now office colleague Compa Tréas. We always look forward to hearing from Depew and hope that you dig his piece here about the current political landscape as much as we have.

Voices That Must Be Heard

The circus that accompanies the presidential campaign has returned to the American landscape, but many people will ignore the issues and fail to educate themselves about either of the candidates.

A large percentage of citizens decide not to participate in the electoral process at all, effectively silencing themselves.

You're now probably wondering why you should continue reading this prose that has nothing to do with you. Simply put, because politics effects us all in some capacity. Politics molds public policy, laws, sentencing requirements, gang ordinances, taxes, civil and prisoner rights and essentially your freedom.

Obviously, many young people don't think twice about politics but consider the upcoming election for a moment.

Locally, voters will decide whether or not to amend the three strikes law which likely effects some of your family members or those of us other readers. Amendment of the law could lead to the release of some prisoners who have received excessive sentences for minor infractions and a parole date for many others. Voters, essentially, hold the freedom of those people in their hands. They have the power to provide a reprieve to those the system has victimized.

Do you still believe that politics aren't important?

Currently there are bills in the state congress that could reduce the punishment for possessing marijuana to a \$100 fine, to ban tobacco from all state run youth and adult correctional facilities and to establish educational and vocational programs for all inmates at those institutions.

The people responsible for deciding the outcome of those bills are the officials that we elect. Thus, we have the power to either put a candidate in office or put him on the streets if we don't agree with the decisions being made.

Nationally, the presidential election will effect America's foreign policy positions which relate, potentially, to more young people being needed to defend the nation.

Obviously, this written piece is extremely short, yet it will make somebody think about politics and voting that wouldn't otherwise. Many of you may have never thought about how politics directly effects your life, but those of you who have been through the system should understand the power of the electoral process. Encourage your family members to participate and educate themselves on the issues that will effect us all. We cannot except to force change by continuing to silence ourselves.

We cannot except to force change by continuing to silence ourselves.

LAMELL STINSON

Lamell Stinson is a good friend of Ladaro Pennix's in Corcoran State Prison, and in his first essay for The Beat Without, he writes passionately about his daughter.

Why I'm Missing My Daughter

I'm missing my daughter because I can't watch her grow up, that is the main reason. It hurts even expressing myself on paper. When my daughter was born, I saw before me a priceless jewel, for she sparkled my life like the North Star within the night sky. I never thought missing someone will tear me apart, until I laid down at night within these walls of terror and reality set in, and I found myself shedding tears over missing my little girl.

You never think of the consequences that come from your actions until it's too late and you're sitting in a cell like me, thinking about the angels you left behind. My angel, who is my daughter--she may not understand why daddy is not at home, but I'm quite sure she realizes something is missing from her life. I've always wanted my daughter to grow up with both parents, with a stable home, and with much love and security that she deserves. But, instead, I took that away from her like a thief who has no compassion for his or her victim. By me acting selfishly, I'm now drowning in a sea of shame and pain, and it's heartbreaking.

Can you imagine being taken away from a loved one—a mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, or someone you just love beyond comprehension? Now imagine it being because of you, that you were taken away behind your own mistakes. That's a cold reality, huh?

Every night that I say my prayers, I beg my daughter for forgiveness, for not being the father she needs me to be. Each day I'm learning the true responsibility of fatherhood, and why I must avoid mistakes, like my present one, which has caused me not to be able to be a true parent/father to my beautiful daughter. "Those who do not learn from their mistakes are doomed to repeat them."

So I am learning through experience, which is my

professor, that being the best father starts here and now, by the knowledge and wisdom that I've learned from my mistakes. Being a father is hard. But being a father who's confined is the worst thing imaginable, because you have to live through the constant day-to-day reality that you have left something behind within the years, months, days, hours, and seconds that is too valuable to be left behind. That time you miss with your child cannot be replaced. I really feel very sorry for those individuals who will never be able to watch their precious kids grow up. I can't even imagine nor understand how they are feeling; for me, I got another chance to be there for my daughter.

Therefore I must use this situation that I am in wisely. Indicating change, meaning a flux, a transfiguration, evolution, etc. Although change is a frightening representative of the unknown, symbolizing what is unknown, unseen, mysterious and dark...threatening our power and control and causes most people to shy away from what we are unfamiliar with or don't understand. Despite the possibility of danger and discomfort navigating through unchartered waters, the journey for some of us is as vital as the air we breathe.

Well, I'm willing to give my daughter my last breath of life without a second thought, to see what's behind the dark rooms of change.

Dedicated to my daughter: Brianna Alexis Stinson. To me Bri-Bri, you are the flesh and blood incarnation of God's infinite love. So my challenge to God, my prayers, have already been answered. Please forgive Daddy for not being there. I've never meant to hurt you. I'm sorry.

Every second of the day I'm thinking of you. I love you, my angel, my princess, my heart, my daughter. Daddy will be home soon, I promise.

I love you, Bri-Bri.
Love, Daddy.

ESMOND SANFORD is hooked, as evidenced by the slew of submissions he's dropped over the past few weeks (so many that we fear we won't be able to keep up). As he wrote in his letter, "This will become my family — if you all want a brotha from the Ill. state?" Yep, Esmond, we'll take you, even all the way from Illinois. It is remarkable that this little program, started in one unit in San Francisco YGC, has now spread so far and wide. Esmond, one of the newest members of The Beat family, comes to us from Madison County Jail in Edwardsville, Illinois.

This Ring, This Rose

Sometimes a man makes the mistakes of taking what he loves the most for granted. He really can't see his true pride and joy until its almost gone. But sometimes, a man has a real woman who can see past the wrong he has done, and forgive him for his humanity.

That's why a man must be totally committed to his love of his life. He must give her something engraved deep in his heart and hers. This is why, Ciara, I give you this ring and this rose. These are our virtues that will sustain our love and our friendship.

The ring represents our commitment, our bond, our strength towards one another in and through all adversity. It is our belief that we can overcome anything as long as we are one together.

The rose represents our love, our compassion for one another. It's our friendship, the thing that makes us be in love. It's the first we feel when our bodies meet face to face, cheek to cheek. It's our desires for one another. It's our emotions through it all.

So Ciara, my black ebony queen, I offer these two symbols as a token of our love and commitment. I offer this ring and this rose out of love.

I miss you, and I will forever love you. Forgive me for my transgressions.

The Cell: Volume 1

Dark . . . Trying to figure out how I got here. I must have had another episode of drug use and a bad nightmare. I thought I stayed home, but it really seems that I went out into the night. I hope I didn't hurt anyone. I hope I didn't make any victims. Oh shhh, man, God help me! Send me relief from this cancer of the mind. Free me from these distorted images of pain and rage! Teach me how to control, or even overcome, my afflicted, tormented soul.

No. There is no help for you.

Who are you?

I am the thing that controls and kills you daily and nightly. I am the alter voice of reason! I am your extreme rage alter-ego!

Oh me!

Oh yes.

But I thought you were gone and I could have sworn I had better control of you!

But, as you can see, you're weak — you have no strength. I've taken your purposes in life. I've taken your wife, your girl, your father, your mother, and even your kids — and freedom! And in its place, I've give you: armed robbery, hate, rage, murder, sexual deviance, addiction, emptiness, frustration, and total chaos.

Oh God! What did you make me do?

I made you realize that through me, you can make the world pay — through me, your rage and fire can forever live!

No!

Yes.

There must be a way for me to regain myself, my sanity, my truth of self? I got to free myself from this cage, this hellish mental cell!
(to be continued)

Ghetto Scriptures

Just as a man is lost
a man can be found at his own cost
Just as a man loses his soul
don't mean that he can't regain it and grow old.
The one who sees the anguish of the streets
can overcome anything his mind seeks.
One who's true to the game
will receive 'hood fame
But one who is true to truth
in God he pursues.
Only the gun can save a thug
but the responsibility can save a son
Understanding of self can set you free
but a false sense of what a man is what becomes of thee
One's whose life is overrun by bloodshed
seeks refuge to his God
but until he recognize his most high
his head can never nod.
All hail the minds of the sick
given to you one of the most sickest.
Ghetto scriptures.

Two Rings

With these rings, I give to you everything that makes up
happiness, joy, love, commitment, and loyalty.
With these rings I say to you that I'm with you, through it all, no
matter what.
With these rings I bring the wonderful bond that we aim to share
forever and ever with one another.
With these two rings I give to you my heart,
my unity, and my vitality.
With these two rings I give you all of my undying love,
and forever the truth and respect you deserve.
With these two rings, I say I love you.

Modernized Slavery

Born to poverty
I struggle to find a way out of my born depression
in the heart of my struggles I see no future, no
help
no way out of this non-progression
School systems show me no favor
dysfunctional families
is the bitter taste of loss I savor
I see no other alternative but to show the streets
my newfound flavor . . .
modernized slavery
My creed to the streets now keeps me focused
on this urban jungle's treats
so gone now that all I see is addiction, affliction
distress oppress
and the night fully understands my pact with the
savage street creeps
Now, part of the system chattel form slavery
a number is name
and my wages are five cents
a day
and I pray that my soul don't
have to pay
this price of . . .
modernized slavery
I'm now forced to work against
my will
called to chow like animals
in a cage high on death's hill
I try to find a way to express
positively this cruel pain I now
feel
I'm feelling . . .
modernized slavery

RIP Redrum

My ninja, my home, my Bonnie on the Clyde side
I know that if my ninja comes at me
it's you that's down to ride
As we choke on that green
it's you my ninja that's looking mean
It's in your hand around that cold steel
dumb-ass ninjas not knowing that blood is about to spill
From cradle to grave
our thug love was written by the ghetto sage
finessing our way through the world to see
our shorties come of age
You got my back 'til the day you died
so it's your name I say loud with pride: "Redrum!"
I wrote this ghetto scribe
to let you know I always keep your name alive . . .
RIP Redrum

STEVEN NARY Steven Nary is a new writer to our Beat Without pages. He comes to us from Pleasant Valley State Prison. He drops some heavy lines on us and a tight poem so brace yourselves folks — it's good! So lets give a warm welcome to this new writer! Read on folks. Soak up the game!

Keyhole of Hope

Falling down the life's slope
 Locked away
 With only a keyhole of hope
 Imagine darkness with light coming from the
 keyhole
 If we just look inside
 It shows us our life's role
 The past, present, and a question
 Letting us realize
 This is our life's lesson
 The question is when
 Turn the key
 Enter a life so far from the end
 A keyhole of hope is all we need
 Stop the emotional bleed
 And turn the golden key
 Then slowly things will come into sight
 A journey to come
 Less darkness, more light.
 Lock away
 Forever in this hole
 The light comes to a fade
 And the door to a close
 But open the door
 See the dreams soar
 And other doors will appear
 With plenty of opportunities near
 That keyhole of hope is all we need.

Dear Beat Within

First, let me say thanks for the warm welcoming to your publication. I was both inspired and amazed at all the talented minds writing to The Beat Within. It is truly a positive forum to allow such expression.

I don't know what I can contribute but I aim at learning and helping others. I am a seeker who loves the wisdom of all cultures and all generations now and before us. It is important to learn and encourage all to express their message or story because we all have a story and those stories touch lives and can make a difference. I hope giving you information in a piecemeal fashion is okay. I start this set of words with a quote: "Words are a form of action, capable of influencing change." - Ingrid Bengis

Right from the opening pages of reading The Beat Within this quote reminded me so much of how words really can make a change. Expressed in a positive light words can change our lives and the lives of our communities.

I am a 27-year-old male who has been incarcerated since the age of eighteen. I had an average upbringing with basketball stardom in high school. My first major decision was joining the United States Navy right out of high school. Almost a year later another decision would see me land a Life sentence in the California prison system. More later on the decisions that put me here. My point is I had a good life, but I was young and thought I was untouchable. Then life checked me back to reality.

I present you with this thought, what will it take? We all come from different lifestyles and every action we take affects our families, friends, and our communities. Why not take the positive road, the endless road of opportunity and possibilities. Everyday I try to live according to a saying I once read in the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying. It said, "What you are is what you have been, what you will be is what you do now." Work now for a better tomorrow. Until pen meets paper again I leave you two poems.

Thanks for everything. Sorry for the horrible writing. Take care, stay safe, and God bless. Much love and respect,

Is I had a good life, but I was young and thought I was untouchable. Then life checked me back to reality.

What Will It Take

What will it take,
 to open our eyes
 to hear the cries
 and listen to the lies
 What will it take
 for people to take a stand
 and lend a helping hand
 to those stuck in life's quicksand
 What will it take
 for the variety
 of our society
 to see violence and suffering as a reality
 What will it take
 to get rough and tough
 and go beyond a couple of months
 of saying enough is enough
 What will it take
 to see our lives become safe and better
 to see people of all backgrounds come together
 to see hatred, confusion, and the feeling of being

different and alone disappear forever
 What will it take
 to get past the signs that say beware
 to stop being scared
 to help those we fear
 What will it take
 to make us believe
 that a tragedy or horrific scene
 can't eventually be passed off as a bad dream.
 What will it take
 for politics to be set aside
 so people can reach the troubled minds
 that just need patience and time
 Why a what will it take
 maybe it's too much trouble
 or it's alright to see people stumble
 and families crumble.
 maybe it's a mistake
 to try and help
 maybe it's just too late
ASK YOURSELF
WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

THE POETIC PRISONER In Joseph Heller's wonderful novel, "Catch-22," the main character wants to be declared insane in order to get out of the madness of war. Unfortunately, the fact that he wants to get out of the war proves that he is not insane. These two poems by the courageous Poetic Prisoner are in that tradition. The fact that the poet wishes for a cold heart could only be expressed by one whose warmth burns his soul. The heart he writes of, battered by the hypocrisy of American violence and our off-hand and unacknowledged brutality against our own children, is bruised and hurt not because it's filled with holes, but because it is whole. It feels everything. As with so many, we wish we could ease the pain — but not at the expense of this precious work of art that is the poet himself.

Holes In My Heart

Kids should not be incarcerated,
I see you guys once a week and when I leave, I hate it.
'Leave no child behind'
Well, give them a chance to make it.
The same vicious cycle of treating people like shhh
And expecting them to treat their communities
better.
It's evident with every workshop,
With every prison letter.
The fight to do what's right,
While each one of our environments were wrong.
How can I help the weak
If I ain't one of the strong?
This places a hole in my heart,
That's now a piece of art.
The many people I robbed and victimized,
The man that lost one of his eyes.
The people who wish for my demise,
And when I display my talents these people act
surprised.
Stealing from stores
Doesn't seem that bad when my country's at war.
What about violence makes us want more?
What are we killing each other for?
Pregnant teens
Having babies with desperate flends.
So children grow up with one goal in mind,
And that's get the cream by any means.
This places a hole in my heart,
That's now this wonderful piece of art.
Can't run away from the world with my girl,
Although that's exactly what I want to do.
People come with too many opinions,
More added problems to go through.
Can't be alone with the one I love,
We've limited the time we have to kiss and hug.
And all because
People don't realize I really need love.
Where's my house and picket fence?
I have to make appointments to see the love of my life
Today she's booked me in from six to ten.
Sometimes I feel like she wants a man with more
dividends,
But I'm not trying to measure up to her past lovers,
I could care less what she did to them,
Or even why she got rid of them.
This places a final hole in my heart,
And now it's become this piece of art.

**if my soul
was cold,
There'd be no
good side to show**

**Kids should not
be incarcerated,
I see you guys
once a week and
when I leave,
I hate it.
'Leave no child
behind'
Well, give them a
chance to make it.**

I Wish My Soul Was Cold

Through all the madness, my heart remains warm
But sometimes I wish it was as cool as the breeze.
And there are other times
Where I wish it would just freeze.
For if my soul was cold,
I wouldn't struggle to be bold.
I would play the hand I was dealt,
And wouldn't be so quick to fold.
There are times where I'd love
To be disrespectful and mean.
Times where I dream
I could be neglectful and obscene.
For if my soul was cold,
There wouldn't be stories told.
I'd go through life alone,
But would have peace when I grow old.
There'd be no room for feeling guilty,
No attempt to feel the presence of a woman that's silky.
I wouldn't want to look clean,
I'd be content with being filthy.
And if my soul was cold,
There'd be no good side to show.
I wouldn't have to write my pain down for the world to see,
For my poems wouldn't flow.
I wouldn't worry about going too slow,
And I'd hurt others to get my dough.
I wouldn't attract and distract people with my glow,
O', if only my soul was cold.

ISRAEL PEREZ There is a tragic irony in this mini-masterpiece: That from the smothering prison experience that has extinguished the light of humanity in this great writer, he is able to illuminate a world for the rest of us. We, of course, who have been enlightened over and over again by the writing of the incomparable Israel Perez, cannot accept his conclusion that he has been "switched off." Instead, we believe that to protect that flame from being put out by the winds of war, it is turned way down, but still it flickers — to be rekindled into brilliant heat and light when fueled by freedom. With brutal insight, Wardog writes us from the SHU at Corcoran State Prison.

Switched Off

Even the metal meshing of my cage could do little to take away from the beauty of a butterfly as it delicately fluttered from dandelion to dandelion. A foot above the green grass, it flew looking like a small-scale plane flying over a vast tropical forest. I watched as it descended from its small-scale sky, and settled upon yet another inviting flower.

The flower in full bloom made me recall a commercial I'd seen in my cell the night before, a commercial guaranteeing the quick death of dandelions and all other plant life the unseen speaker deemed troublesome. But for the life of me, I couldn't understand why someone would find the yellow flower a nuisance or an eyesore. Maybe it was just the numerous years I'd spent in prison that made me sentimental over one of nature's smallest works, or maybe it was due to the blind man's memory I had of bringing a flower to my nose — I knew I'd done it before, I just couldn't see it in my mind's eye.

Whatever it was that held me so captivated, it wouldn't allow me to take my eyes off the butterfly's paper-thin wings. They moved up and down ever so slowly, making me imagine they helped the creature to drink up the flower's sweet nectar. I couldn't help but marvel at the way their colors wonderfully mixed so that not even a gifted painter could capture their beauty on canvas. And when the butterfly took to flight once more, it seemed almost cruel the bright, unblemished flower could not also sprout wings and join it. And after the butterfly grew too faint in the distance, the metal meshing too obscuring to track it, I felt it cruel I could not also...

It's strange that even as I approach the day which will mark collectively half my life spent in some form of incarceration or another, I can still discover beauty in the cracks. I can sit on the cement floor of one of Corcoran Prison's outside dog kennel-like cages and appreciate a sliver of nature, block out the rows of loudly occupied cages and mull over a small piece of the real world, that has somehow managed to slip past the lethal electric fence. And even stranger is the fact that out of all the qualities I entered prison with so many years ago, only my poetic soul remains unscathed.

Now, I know many enjoying their freedoms in America, the ones who only get a taste of imprisonment at annoying traffic lights or time-consuming checkout lines, would hear such a claim and think it a blessing, see my surviving soul as some touching inspiration straight out of "The Shawshank Redemption." But I've come to view a poetic soul in prison as one of the heaviest burdens to bear, a burden I must drag through some of the world's most unforgiving terrain. Through thorny thickets, jagged rocks, over piles of distorted humanity, where time and time again I am forced to halt my stumbling march so as to unsnare my foul from the stiff limbs of a corpse.

But even with a soul full of poetry, my mind is not immune to the realities of prison. For, though it may enable me to see beauty in prison's ugliness, it doesn't prevent the ugliness from sneaking into my brain.

You see, I've come to believe there is a point in time in every long-term prison sentence when a switch gets thrown deep inside a prisoner's head, a switch so deep, not even a team of the world's most skilled neurologists can perform invasive surgery to correct it. I believe once this switch has been thrown, the affected prisoner can never be quite the same. They may walk amongst other human beings and, for the most part, go undetected, smiling when recognizing a familiar face, laughing when told a humorous tale, holding up their end of an intellectual conversation, even expressing deep emotion when confronted with a sad situation.

But inside these unfortunate people, something so essential to truly enjoying life on our planet has been stamped out of them, smothered out of them. So, if one were to look closely enough, one would be shaken to the core to find that humanizing something missing from their eyes.

This switch, flame, light that gets turned off — whatever name one chooses to call it — is not limited to only prisoners carrying out long, grueling sentences. No, this internal death

can also be found in the stares of battle-weary soldiers, soldiers who have had countless enemies lined up in their weapons' crosshairs. It's in prostitutes who have known too many cruel men in too many motel rooms, and even in our most vulnerable: children who have been shuffled from foster home to loveless foster home, never knowing stability or security.

Now, for most of my years in prison, this switch phenomenon has never been a threat to me. In fact, I'm ashamed to admit that up until recently, I used to think myself somewhat superior to these zombie-like men, that somehow I was above their inability to be wholly human, to truly feel, that their sad plight was far removed from me, no closer than some starving family in the Darfur region of Sudan.

But that all changed a few days ago, a few days ago when my stomach growled violently for the third time. It angrily sought to tell me what I already knew, that the evening meal was nearly two hours late. And being that prison is all about set routines, the two hours was a major anomaly — so much so, that even though I was far from the risk of starving by anyone's standards, my stomach still wished to inform me it didn't appreciate the change in routine one bit.

Of course, for those who have never experienced the traumatic agony of imprisonment, a grumbling belly is something to laugh at before appeasing with a short trip through a fast food "drive-thru," or a simple pull of the refrigerator handle. But for the imprisoned mind, especially the SHU (Security Housing Unit) prisoner's, a small matter such as an agitated stomach has the potential to trigger violent thoughts, psychotic thoughts, even murderous thoughts. This volatile state is due to long periods of isolation — isolation from family, friends, from normal situations of everyday life. Due to year after year of sensory deprivation, murderous thoughts are easily given birth to by the simplest of things: a fellow inmate's singing voice, a continuous, tapping sound, a petty-minded guard's reaction to the most trivial of a rule's violation.

So, when my stomach first detected the slight variation in the daily feeding routine, I quickly attempted to preempt any negative thoughts with a few mouthfuls of water. However, the tiny seeds of anxiety had already been sown, and when the five O'clock local news came and went, I was unable to prevent those seedlings from sprouting shoots on the frontal lobes of my brain, unable to stop the anxiety from paralyzing my rational thoughts. Even the catchy theme from ABC's World News Tonight and the authoritative voice of Peter Jennings was unable to hold my attention like it usually did.

All my mind was capable of doing was embracing the rising anger over the realization my set schedule was irretrievably disrupted, that the issuing of mail would now be delayed due to the late feeding, which also meant there wouldn't be ample time to respond to any letters before mail pick-up, nor to read any periodicals before my favorite primetime shows came on. It also meant my nighttime snack would have to be moved back an hour or so, because I insisted on spaced out meals. Yet, this also presented a distressing problem, for I once read somewhere that consuming food near bedtime was very bad.

The chain of inane thoughts had me mentally bouncing off the walls. And when the six O'clock hour came around, it found me pacing my cell muttering unintelligible complaints, complaints that in my head sounded like a brilliantly scathing speech — a blistering condemnation directed at the pompous think-tanks and self-righteous conservatives who thought up all the flawed "tough-on-crime" policies I suffered under.

Then, just as my mind was threatening to approach conspiracy theory levels, the loud crack of the building's door unlocking signaled the arrival of dinner. The tight pale line that had become my mouth softened, and my angrily flared nostrils calmed. Almost against my will, the upsetting turmoil I'd been experiencing dwindled in the face of familiarity. The sound of keys unlocking locks and heavy trays sliding into food slots reassured me the world was returning to normal, with water once again flowing uphill and fish gliding through the clouds. The new universe I'd been taught to accept reverted to its former

ISRAEL PEREZ (CONT.)

continued from previous page

form.

And then it happened. Without warning the building's alarm system activated, followed by a CO's booming voice yelling, "Man down" (inmate in need of medical assistance). Not wishing to believe my ears, I moved to the cell's window, hands lathered with soap. "Out of all the effing times," I grumbled to myself as CO after CO rushed into the building. Immediately all my earlier anxiety flooded back while I watched the COs don their protective helmets and grab a Plexiglas shield and metal stretcher.

With movements that seemed well practiced, the heavily protected guards entered the "man down" cell. Moments later, they emerged with an unconscious Hispanic inmate who was lying on the stretcher, hands cuffed behind his back. I recognized the inmate immediately. However, I didn't know him personally, and at that moment, I had no desire to. In fact, I found myself terribly angry with him, enraged with him for further delaying the already late meal.

In one smooth motion, the COs gently set the metal stretcher and its load down. They placed the inmate on the floor right outside their office where, like a hawk, I watched their every move, not for any misconduct relating to the helpless inmate, but for any signs that passing out the remaining dinner trays was still on their minds. And when a lone officer returned to the food cart, I couldn't help but mouth a "thank God."

Not bothering to scrape away the bread from the breaded fish like I'd always done, I swallowed my food, hardly taking time to chew. I could literally feel my temples throb with each bite, hear

the blast of air coming out of my nose with each breath. I tore into my fish patty as if it were one that Jesus had multiplied to feed his listeners. And when the last morsel of food had been spooned from my tray, I frustratingly felt more famished than before taking my first bite.

With a cup of semi-cold water in hand, and an unfulfilled feeling in my stomach, I walked to the cell's window, thinking I would be greeted by the same barren scene. Instead, I was confronted with the earlier group of guards. They stood talking and laughing over the still unconscious inmate, waiting for the arrival of the MTA (Medical Technician Assistant). And though I was not privy to the subject of their conversation, I imagined it surrounded a new stereo system one of them had had installed in his vehicle, or the outcome of last night's game.

And, as if my eyes were opening for the first time, I finally noticed the inmate at their feet, and realized that only moments ago, I had put my grumbling stomach above the life of another human being — that not a single thought for his family, wife, or children had crossed my mind as I cursed him for delaying dinner. All that had mattered to me was my own selfish need.

Looking at the slack mouth of the unconscious inmate, I felt the barely chewed meal in my gut turn to sand, felt the semi-cold water I sipped become shards of glass in my throat. It hit me all of a sudden, hit me so hard I nearly lost my breath. Somewhere along the way, it had happened to me. somewhere along my long journey through the prison system, I had been switched off.

NINO ESPARZA The following pieces by Nino Esparza (we hope we got your name right, Nino — couldn't quite make out the writing) were sent along by new BWO contributor Esmond Sanford. And so The Beat family continues to grow . . . Nino drops two deep poems about how much he misses those he left behind, and about how the heartache and sorrow only grows deeper with time. We're sure many of you will feel what he's saying. Nino comes to us from Madison County Jail in Edwardsville, Illinois.

Wasted

Wasting away in this man-made hell
I fail to awaken from this nightmare
this judge's evil spell.
The steel wire and bulletproof glass all conspire
to snatch away some hope
to call my love a lion.
I awaken at night drenched with freedom's fight
soaked with hate
hate of remembering unchained memories of a life that
didn't wait.
I'm tormented and teased nightly by the people I love most
I awaken
still shaking and grasping their ghost.
In my dreams my daughter doesn't know me
while my wife goes unchecked
my son grows intolerable and shows no respect!
I try to say that things will turn out alright
but my heart won't grant permission to thoughts I know
are lies
My conscience
shamelessly
turns each night at lock-up time
I imagine missed celebrations
while hating myself more that I hate my crimes
The days aren't any better
as you wait on letters
to keep you in touch
and when visits are through
there's nothing to do
but miss them all too much.
I once read the words right off of the page
each time I read it I remembered something I forgot to say.
These bars and steel of cards we're dealt
is just one part

Trippin'

As I sit in my cell
with you on mind and in my heart
your powerful memories tag-team my body and soul
they rip me apart!
It's alarming sometimes the way I can smell your
perfume
it sets off a code red in my head and offends my
senses
the way that I love you.
I dreamed the other night
we were under the stars walking along
you asked me to always love you
and never do you wrong
I gladly gave you my word
as you gave me your hand
the night was so beautiful
so completely grand!
We talked like we haven't in ages
and cried a little too
it was so honest and pure and we knew for sure
without the words "I do"
It was mesmerizing and hypnotic
the way you held my gaze
your sparkling, moist eyes made me cry
girl I miss you more every day!
I awoke
so heart broke
feeling cold and all alone
so I read your letter and felt much better
with the strength to keep on.
I have to remember to forget my fears and doubts
and hold on tight to a heart that's right
and send my love inside out.

That's the problem nowadays — everyone tries to outdo everyone, because of trying to be cool, hip, down. Better to be yo'self; can't no one stop that. Treat others how you want to be treated, and maybe, just maybe, this world would be a better place.

check out the rest of AR Ridah's contest piece on page 51